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**“A WONDERFUL COUNTRY IN THE CAUCASUS...”<sup>[1]</sup>  
A BRIEF HISTORY OF RUSSO-GEORGIAN RELATIONS IN THE PRE-SOVIET ERA**

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*“For us in Georgia, the sun rises in the North”*

Eduard Shevardnadze, First Secretary of Communist Party of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, circa 1978

In July 2010, the Georgian parliament approved a resolution to mark 25<sup>th</sup> February as the Soviet Occupation day.<sup>[2]</sup> In September 2010, Georgian students received a new history textbook detailing what is termed as the history of the “200 years of Russian occupation of Georgia”.

**Summary**

This essay problematizes recently established clichés in both Russia and Georgia, clichés that promote mutual anxiety whose roots are traced back in the modern history of these two nations. It identifies the roots of these clichés as closely related to the stirred interrelationship of post-Soviet Russian and Georgian elites determined by discord over a series of political issues that resonated in both countries’ public discourse attributing to the political conflict significant ethnic overtones. Focusing on the Tsarist period, the article seeks to highlight the evolution of mutual perceptions between the Russians and Georgians, whilst emphasizing the Georgian perspective and concentrating heavily on the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a crucial period that predetermined the Georgian view of Russia and the Russians as part of Georgians’ modern-day self-consciousness.

**Keywords:** Russia, Georgia, Caucasus, perceptions, history, conflict.

Following the deterioration of the Russo-Georgian relations in the post-Soviet period that culminated during the 2008 war in South Ossetia and the subsequent recognition of independence by Moscow of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia's breakaway territories, anti-Russian sentiments have been on the rise in Georgia, a tiny country to the south of the Greater Caucasus mountain range that used to be a historical crossroads of many empires, cultures and religions. Similarly, anti-Georgian bias have gradually risen in post-Soviet Russia which has manifested itself in the aftermath of what came to be known as the "Rose revolution", a popular revolt that took place in Georgia in Fall 2003, resulting in the ousting of Eduard Shevardnadze, a patriarch of (post-) Soviet politics, and accession to presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, a young and pro-Western reformist politician determined to regain control over separatist territories and ensure the country's integration into key Western political and security organizations. Indeed, in the recent decade, mutual anxiety between Russian and Georgian officials has grown to unprecedented proportions threatening to affect the milieu of inter-ethnic relations on the level of individuals that has always been marked by a relatively high degree of mutual sympathy.<sup>[3]</sup> This essay is an attempt to look at the modern history of Russo-Georgian relations concentrating heavily on the Tsarist period and providing a view of Russia and the Russians from a Georgian perspective.

### **Georgia: A Brief History**

While in Armenia, after centuries of foreign domination viewed as suffering in the name of faith and the nation, the regaining of statehood has had a virtually metaphysical dimension, and while to the contrary in Azerbaijan the idea of a unified nation state had never taken root, in Georgia the announcement of independence was rather understood as the restoration – however much desired – of historical justice. The year 1991 was regarded as an important milestone, meaning the reestablishment of the historical continuity of Georgian statehood that had been fundamentally disrupted twice in modern history: in 1801 and again over a century later in 1921.

The (Proto-) Georgian state has been documented in various forms since the early Middle Ages; some local sources even give a much earlier date, placing the emergence of a unified Georgian kingdom already in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>[4]</sup> Georgian historiography lacks a uniform view of the ethnogenesis of the Georgians; traditionally there has been a conflict of opinion between an archaistic and an autochthonous approach, but there are ever more frequent attempts to synthesize the two viewpoints.<sup>[5]</sup> The Georgian state has gone through periods of great development and decline. It flourished, for example, during the rule of King David IV (David the Builder, 1089–1125) or of Queen Tamar (1184–1213), when the united Georgian kingdom included vast areas of the South Caucasus and eastern Anatolia. During periods of decline and political disintegration, Georgia<sup>[6]</sup> was subject to the power of Rome, the Persian empires, Byzantium, Arabs, Mongols and first Seljuq then Ottoman Turks, for whose rulers the territory represented a strategically located point between the endless Eurasian steppes to the north and the Anatolian-Iranian plains to the south.<sup>[7]</sup> Georgian kingdoms and principalities were thus very often under the domination of powerful neighbors, but elements of Georgian statehood were seldom eliminated entirely, if by that we mean the running of a political entity by rulers of local origin. The territorial and political continuity of Georgian statehood, whether in the form of the ancient unified kingdoms or (semi-)

vassal principalities, has played an important role in recent years in efforts to consolidate Georgian national consciousness.

Meanwhile, the strong differences of regional culture and religion that have been only partially a consequence of the historical ascendancy of one power or another have hindered the consolidation of a collective identity of ethnic Georgians within the framework of a unified political nation, and this difficult process has therefore taken long centuries.<sup>[8]</sup> The problem of the cultural and political fragmentation of the Georgian nation was solved successfully during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was a period of effective “social engineering of nationalities.” With the development of nationalism, however, there was also a strengthening of national self-awareness among the non-Georgian nationalities inhabiting the border areas of the Georgian state – whether this involved the former Meskheta Turks, Javakheti Armenians and Borchali (Kvemo Kartli) Azerbaijanis to the south or especially the South Ossetians in the north and Abkhazians in the northwest of the country. In the country’s modern history, the mosaic-like (sub)ethnic maps of Georgia with conflicting (sub)ethnic and political loyalties within the country and beyond its borders has been quite an effective tool for intervention by outsiders, and this has become the nightmare of Georgian intellectuals and statesmen striving for the territorial and ideological-political cohesion of the country. They are especially sensitive to the efforts – if sometimes only perceived – of foreign powers to take advantage of Georgia’s ethnic and territorial fragmentation.

### **Relations with Russians and Russia in historical perspective**

Until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the remnants of the Byzantine Empire were swallowed up by the expanding Ottoman Empire, Georgia had ceased to have direct contact with the Christian world. The strong Greek influence, which was not limited to the area of their shared Orthodox religion,<sup>[9]</sup> together with a no less strong (old-) Persian influence had an effect on a broad stratum of Georgian high culture, and this is especially true of the (early) Middle Ages, when Georgian statehood solidified and strengthened. The territory of historical Georgia was united for the first time in history in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the effort of rulers from the Georgian branch of the ancient Bagratid (Bagrationi) Dynasty, which ruled the eastern Georgian states almost without interruption until 1783, and formally until 1801. The idea, strong by local standards, of ethnic and territorially grounded statehood based on Orthodoxy ensured during the following centuries that the consciousness of Georgia’s elite were permanently ingrained with a gravitation towards the West and Christian Europe, and with a self-image of being a part of the West in spite of the massive cultural and political influence of Turkey and Persia.

The orientation of Georgian kings towards the increasingly powerful Muscovite or Russian state, regarding itself as the “third Rome” and a bastion of Orthodoxy, dates back to as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Georgian kings started addressing their Russian counterparts in an attempt to obtain military and political relief in their permanent warfare with their powerful neighbors. In fact, this can be viewed as a continuation of the religiously grounded orientation of Georgia towards the West, Christendom and Europe. The orientation of the Georgian elite towards the West began to manifest itself most emphatically in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the rule of King Erekle (Heraclius) II Bagrationi (Bagratid) of Kartli-Kakheti who ruled over much of Eastern Georgia. This orientation had both ideological and strategic reasons; attempts to create close contacts with the remote

northern state had already been undertaken several centuries earlier. As mentioned above, Georgian kings and princes had hoped for the aid of the Orthodox rulers of Russia for the solidifying of their rule at home, but above all they wanted to secure an ally in the unceasing wars with their Muslim neighbors, Turkey and Persia, whose expansionist plans caused the inhabitants of Georgia considerable problems.<sup>[10]</sup> In turn, some sort of association of Georgia to the Russian state was proposed by Georgians in various times. In spite of the many communications from Georgian kings, the first Georgia-Russian alliance is not documented until 1783, when the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed, sealing the status of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti as a vassal state of the Russian Empire in exchange for the providing of guarantees of security by St. Petersburg. In 1795, when the army of the Persian ruler Agha Mohammed-Khan Qajar directly threatened Tiflis (Tbilisi), however, the Russian troops in Georgia remained neutral; their failure to fulfill their duty as allies cost the lives of tens of thousands of inhabitants of the ravaged city and kingdom. Another controversial event, often brought up by post-Soviet Georgian nationalists, was the unilateral decree in 1801 of Tsar Alexander I, who had just ascended to the Russian imperial throne, dissolving the Kingdom of Kartli-Kacheti in contradiction to the terms of the Treaty of Georgievsk; thereafter, *guberniyas* were set up on Georgian territory following the Russian model.

By 1866, St. Petersburg had eventually occupied western Georgian territory. Soon after the annexation of the principalities of western Georgia, the less than sensitive policies of Russia caused several local uprisings and disturbances, often orchestrated by Georgian nobility (1812–1813, 1819–1829, 1841), some of whose sought to give the Georgian throne back to the Bagratid dynasty; nevertheless, they were bloodily suppressed. Additionally, in 1832 there was an attempted coup – the only one in the country’s history under Russian rule – by Georgian aristocrats striving for the independence of the Georgian state under the restored rule of the highly respected Bagrationi dynasty.

Nonetheless, Georgian culture flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - as did Armenian and Azerbaijani culture. For the first time after many centuries, long-term stability and relative prosperity were secured, brought about by Russian rule; the country underwent a population explosion. Especially in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, economic growth intensified. As the seat of the Russian governor for the Caucasus, Tiflis became the cultural and, in a sense, the economic metropolis of the region.<sup>[11]</sup> While centuries of perceived backwardness combined with unending wars and suffering are associated in the Georgian national consciousness with the culturally “alien” neighboring Muslim powers, Turkey and Persia, there was a growing awareness of religious, cultural and historical kinship with Russia.<sup>[12]</sup> To use the words of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, a well-known Soviet-era author and the father of Georgia’s first president, “Russia was called upon to carry out a great cultural and historical mission in the East. The semi-European monarchy fought against tyrannical Persia and Turkey. Russia started the offensive against the Muslim states that Byzantium had turned over in the name of Western civilization to the Austrian Habsburgs and the Russian Romanovs.”<sup>[13]</sup>

Georgian nobility had the same rights and duties as their Russian counterparts; as a consequence, they could be incorporated into imperial institutions, the administration and, last but not least, the army, and in this way the Romanov crown soon secured the loyalty of the local elite. Among high-ranked members of Georgian nobility who obtained wide public acclaim in the Empire was, for instance, Prince Peter Bagration, the hero of the Patriotic War (1812) who died from

injuries suffered in the Borodino battle.

Most importantly, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, liberal Russian circles were enthralled with Georgia, the beautiful country beneath the peaks of the Greater Caucasus Range, where one found a rare mingling of the explosiveness of the highlanders with oriental refinement; it was the poets Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov who were responsible for the emergence of this phenomenon.<sup>[14]</sup> Some authors have even gone as far as to claim that Georgia has been the second – naturally after their native Russia – homeland of Russian poets. The colonial authorities were very sympathetic towards the Georgians, whether because of religious affinity or because of a similarity of mindset between the Russian and Georgian nobility and some other reasons. Contemporary Russian accounts describe Georgians as “merry, sociable and congenial in nature.” They are “tied to the homeland and devoted to old practices, ancient myths and customs; they are trusting and sincere; credulous to the point of flippancy; adventurous, perceptive, kind to guests [...] The negative personality traits of Georgians include a lack of energy and industriousness, laziness and a certain apathy, which explains to some extent their dependence on the more determined and more industrious Armenians.”<sup>[15]</sup>

The Russian view of Georgians at the time was at least in part derived from the way that Armenians were viewed. The important socioeconomic changes that took place in the region after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 (the end of traditional feudal relations and the rise of capitalism, industrialization and urbanization) led to the hurtful downfall of the once all-powerful Georgian nobility, while to the contrary the Armenian bourgeoisie took skillful advantage of the changes, soon taking control over the economy and increasingly over the political life of Georgian cities. Unified Georgian national consciousness crystallized at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in opposition to Armenians, who played the role of the notorious “Others”; socioeconomic disputes soon gained such a clearly ethnic dimension that the members of the successful Armenian middleclass became the object of the common hatred of both the Georgian aristocracy and intelligentsia and of Georgians who had formerly lived in the countryside and who were settled in Tiflis and other towns. Typical in this respect is the account of a Russian commentator dated 1873: “Trade in the Caucasus is entirely in the hands of clever and calculating Armenians. Armenians are higher than Georgians in intelligence and in love for work, and for that reason there is nothing surprising in the fact that Georgian properties are rapidly falling into Armenian hands. Georgians are dependent on them just as the Poles are dependent on the Jews and similarly feel toward them the same contempt and hatred (if not more than the Poles toward the Jews).”<sup>[16]</sup> Dissatisfaction with the ever growing political and economic influence of the Armenian element was absorbed to some degree by the dissatisfaction of the Georgian population with the ups and downs of “wild” capitalism and the problems of the Russian authorities with administration of the country.

The failure of the first Russian revolution (1905) led to the strengthening of the police state in Russia. Already beforehand, however, in the spheres of the newly forming Georgian intellectual elite, from the 1870s coming more and more often from the milieu of the *raznochintsy* and sharing none of the aristocracy’s privileges nor its devotion to St. Petersburg, there began to emerge a feeling of dissatisfaction with, among other things, the policy of Russification that started being enforced in the country at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the backers of socialist movements in Georgia started strengthening their position. Some of these movements even

promoted the idea of armed resistance, necessary for the purpose of overthrowing absolutism, and they therefore formed active contacts with Caucasian and mainly Russian allies. Part of the Georgian intellectual elite, developing intensive contacts with European socialists and gradually leaning towards the idea of socio-economic (and national) emancipation, no longer viewed Russia as a liberating state, but rather as a backward empire that was holding up the development of the further Georgian nation. It is no wonder that in the South Caucasus as well as in industrial Baku, it was Georgians who along with Armenians gave the most eager support to the first Russian revolution (1905). By local standards, the Georgians (as well as Armenians) already had a large network of left-wing activists with a well-defined socialist ideology.

These moods gradually strengthened until finally in the spring of 1918, soon after the Russian revolutions and complicated developments in the region, Tiflis declared independence from Russia, as did Yerevan and Baku; according to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia had to give up its holdings in the South Caucasus. As in the neighboring countries, the period of the first republic in Georgia (1918–1921) was characterized by sometimes almost desperate attempts to maintain the republic's integrity and independence. Ruled by Social Democrats (Mensheviks), Georgia soon found itself in a state of war with the Volunteer Army of General Anton Denikin, a "Great Russia" nationalist who did not recognize the existence of the Republic of Georgia. In 1918 he fought for the territory around the city of Sochi, claimed both by the White Guards and the government in Tiflis; a greater security threat, however, was the Bolshevik inciting of – or support to - separatism among the South Ossetians and Abkhazians, which caused revolts and their suppression by Georgian armies back in the 1918-1920/1921 period. Indeed, the civil war that broke out in Georgia's ethnic peripheries, costing thousands of lives, was partially instigated by the Bolsheviks who, after the smashing of Denikin's troops at the end of 1919, concentrated on regaining control over the South Caucasus, a strategically important region bordering Turkey and Persia with its rich oil resources (Baku oilfields).

In spite of Tbilisi's strenuous efforts, at the beginning of 1921 Georgia became the last of the countries of the South Caucasian region to be occupied by the Eleventh Red Army, and it became a part of the emerging Soviet Union in spite of the fact that a year beforehand, the Russians had formally recognized Georgian independence and even signed a treaty with Georgian government. In 1922–1936, Georgia together with Armenia and Azerbaijan constituted parts of the so-called Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Republic, an integral part of the Soviet Union.

During the nearly seventy years that followed, peace prevailed in the country, with the exception of the anti-Bolshevik uprising in 1924 and the bloody suppression of peace demonstrations in 1956.<sup>[17]</sup> From the latter half of the 1950s until the 1970s, anti-Communist dissent, well-organized by regional standards, was active in the South Caucasus, with an obvious subtext of national liberation, centered around the poet and musician Merab Kostava and the philologist Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The major event of that period was the series of demonstrations that broke out in the center of Tbilisi in April 1978, at which the Georgian public and mostly university pedagogues and students protested against the plan to cancel the status of Georgian as a state language. By Soviet standards, Georgia enjoyed relative prosperity and was popular thanks to its Black Sea summer resorts, wine, cinematography and unique musical culture.<sup>[18]</sup> Interestingly, similarly to Armenia, but unlike Azerbaijan and Central Asian nations, by Soviet standards relatively high level of ethno-nationalism was tolerated in Georgia.

## Conclusion

The Georgian national identity, unlike that of neighboring nationalities, is less burdened by historical wrongdoings and the Georgian understanding of its neighbors, especially of its powerful neighbors, is – or at least was until the first half of the 1990s – less black and white. This is given by the absence of experience with the massacres and deportations that Armenians have been through and by the absence of any idea of a “thousand-year struggle” that characterizes the Armenian view of the Turkish-Armenian or Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict. The threat from Persia in the south ended back in the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Teheran had to surrender its Caucasian territories to the empire of the Romanovs. Fifty years later, the threat from Turkey also nearly vanished, when in 1878 as a consequence of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) the remaining territory of historical Georgia, still inhabited by a Kartvel element (Adjara),<sup>[19]</sup> was annexed to Russia. The Turkish and Persian (Iranian) factor of Georgian security has become a thing of the past over the last two centuries<sup>[20]</sup> but the Russian factor still remained relevant. Under the influence of this fact the reflection of Russia and the Russians was shaped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which was understood by local intellectuals as the period of gathering historical Georgian territories under the under the dominion of the Empire of the “White Tsar”; yet it underwent serious changes in the years to come. The historically conditioned view of Russia, modified by the most recent developments, still influences the policy thinking of Tbilisi today, and this also applies on a broader, regional scale.

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<sup>[1]</sup>The title of this article is a paraphrase of a famous statement made by Alexander Pushkin who during his 1829 travel in the Caucasus called Georgia “a wonderful country” (“волшебный край”).

<sup>[2]</sup>On that day, in 1921, Georgia was occupied by the Red Army which marked its incorporation into the Soviet Union.

<sup>[3]</sup>For instance, in the aftermath of the August war in South Ossetia (2008), Georgian officials even introduced ban on Russian-language pop-music in restaurants and other public places.

<sup>[4]</sup>Efforts to archaicize the beginnings of statehood as much as possible, which even modern Georgian historiography has failed to avoid, is a widespread phenomenon (not only) in post-Soviet territory.

<sup>[5]</sup>For more details on Georgian conceptions of ethnogenesis, see Shnirelman (2003), 293–353.

<sup>[6]</sup>The place name Georgia seems to come from Russian and is probably an altered form of the Persian-Turkish word *Gurjistan/Gürçistan*, derived from the name of the patron saint of Georgia, St. George (Giorgi in Georgian). The Georgians themselves, however, now generally regard themselves as Kartvels (*Qarthvels*).

<sup>[7]</sup>The southwestern and western areas of present-day Georgia (including Abkhazia and Ajaria) were under the influence of the Ottoman Empire or were directly under its administration, while the

southeastern and eastern areas were subject to Persia, and the areas in the north, difficult to access, retained their independence. These spheres of power and cultural influence (west, east) were the consequence of the great power constellations, within the framework of which the Persian (Iranian) states or Arab caliphates or emirates controlled the south and the Romans, Greeks and Turks, controlling Asia Minor, dominated Georgia's western areas.

<sup>[8]</sup>The Surami mountain range divides Georgia's territory into two equal parts. The present Georgian nation includes a number of historically occurring sub-ethnic groups that are designated by the common term Kartvels (the autoethnonym in modern Georgian, from which the country's historical name, Sakartvelo, is derived), speak more or less independent languages and have specific cultural-regional peculiarities. Those are the Kakhetians or Kakhs (the region of Kakheti), Imeretians (Imereti), Gurians (Guria), Ratchians (Racha), Khevsurs (Khevsureti), Meskhs (Meskheta), Tushians or Tush (Tusheti), Ajarians (Ajaria or Ajara), Ingiloyts (northeastern Azerbaijan or Hereti in Georgian) and other groups. A specific standing both from a linguistic and from a cultural-historical standpoint has been assumed by two other subethnic groups – Svans (Svaneti) of the mountainous northwest and the Megreles (Samegrelo, Mingrelia or Megrelia) in the west of the country (culturally and linguistically close to the Laz, inhabiting certain northeastern parts of modern Turkey), whose dialects are very different from modern written Georgian. The Svans, Megreles and to a certain extent also the Islamicized Ajarians still regarded themselves as independent nationalities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although they are culturally and linguistically related to Georgians (Kartvels).

<sup>[9]</sup>Christianity was adopted by King Mirian of Iberia in 337 after, according to Georgian tradition, the king himself had been baptized by St. Nino of Cappadocia.

<sup>[10]</sup>Especially for the territory of eastern Georgia, the almost regular Dagestani (Lezgin, Avar) raids were a nightmare. The valleys and foothills of Kakheti neighboring Dagestan were often laid to waste by the unexpected hit-and-run-style attacks of highlanders who stole valuables, drove off livestock and abducted people; among highlanders, Georgian brides are said to have been held in particular esteem. Then they would hide out in "eagle's nests" in hard-to-reach, mountainous areas where it was virtually impossible to catch them. Their banditry was also sometimes coordinated with Turkish or Persian rulers, who thereby sought to weaken the east Georgian states as much as possible. It was the attacks by Dagestanis that led the east Georgian ruler to turn for the first time to Moscow with a request for the providing of military assistance (at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). The subsequent military campaign to Dagestan – the very first such campaign undertaken by the Russian state – was requested by the Georgians in order to strike a blow against the local ruler, the Kumyk Shamkhal. In spite of initial successes, the Muscovites' campaign, lacking good organization, was halted by Dagestani troops; it also was not favored by the then still powerful Safavids and Ottomans.

<sup>[11]</sup>At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tiflis began to compete successfully against Baku, which was attracting more and more investors thanks to the industrial extraction of crude oil.

<sup>[12]</sup>Especially in the 1920s and '30s, the "urban" material and spiritual culture of eastern Georgia, and the musical culture in particular, concentrated in Tiflis/Tbilisi, rid itself of "oriental" elements – the age-old influence of Persia and Turkey.

<sup>[13]</sup>Quoted from that author's "Otkrytoe pismo Ulyanovu-Leninu," in *Ozhog rodnogo ochaga* (symposium,

editor not given) (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 222.

<sup>[14]</sup>For more details on the topic of Georgia and the Caucasus in Russian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994).

<sup>[15]</sup>K. K. Arsenyev, F. F. Petrushevsky (eds.), *Enciklopedicheskiy slovar* (St. Petersburg: Brockhaus – Yefron, 1913), vol. 12, 127.

<sup>[16]</sup>Quoted from Sergei Maximov in: Ronald G. Suny, “The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia,” in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change. Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, ed. Ronald G. Suny (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>[17]</sup>These were demonstrations in the center of Tbilisi, held on 9 March 1956. The original purpose for the assembly of inhabitants was for protests against ending the “personality cult” of Joseph Stalin (Jughashvili), of Georgian ethnic origin from the north-Georgian town of Gori, which took place at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR. Thereafter, certain demonstrators, mostly university students, became radical; slogans could even be heard calling for the renewal of Georgian independence. During the attack against the demonstrators, between 80 and 150 mostly young people were killed. Such a big discrepancy in the data is given by the fact that the incident was covered up for decades of Soviet rule, and the authorities never made public the exact numbers of dead and wounded.

<sup>[18]</sup>Representing a special problem is the growth in Russian society of anti-Caucasian attitudes that started spreading back in the 1970s, reaching a climax during the current period. Regarding this topic, see Emil Souleimanov, “O fenoménu kavkazofobie a čečnofobie v ruské společnosti,” *Mezinárodní politika*, 29:5 (2005).

<sup>[19]</sup>We can hardly label the strongly Turkified Muslim Laz, who have historically tended to be under the dominion of Anatolian empires, as part of the (political) Georgian nationality. Nonetheless, the Laz language (Chanun) is very close to west-Georgian Mingrelian. Some other areas of northeastern Turkey, claimed by Georgian as well as Armenian nationalists, are inhabited at present only by Turkish or Kurdish elements, but not by a Georgian or Armenian population.

<sup>[20]</sup>It needs to be said that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey once again threatened Georgia, in 1918. The advance of the Ottoman army, supported by Muslim Adjarians and Meskhis or Meskhetians, was stopped before the suburbs of Tbilisi only by the vigorous intervention of Turkey’s ally, Berlin, which held a protecting hand over the Menshevik Georgian government in Tbilisi.

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