

The Dynamics of Polish-Georgian Relations from the 15th Century till Present

Tea CHUMBURIDZE*

Abstract

Since ancient times, Georgian people had relations with the neighboring and distant countries. Georgian and foreign researchers often faced major questions: what did the Georgian nation endure, how did it endure and how did it survive?

Georgian-foreign relations in most cases addressed freedom and independence of the motherland and this aspect is very important for the understanding of the Georgian nation, its uniqueness and peculiarities. An ancient civilized nation standing at the junction of Europe and Asia, was interesting not only from a strategic point of view, but it owned the Eurasian economic lever and the key to the whole system of relations.

Since the 19th century, relations of Poland and Georgia have emerged and developed within the framework of one empire. This very aspect is of an interest in terms of Polish-Georgian relations, not only from a purely cultural point of view, but from a historical one as well.

Therefore, from today's perspective it seems relevant to discuss our past and its consequences, especially if this deals with the people, once prosperous and strong, and since the 19th century, under the colonial rule.

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* Affiliated Assoc. Prof. Dr., School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
E-mail: tchumburidze@ibsu.edu.ge

Introduction

Polish-Georgian Relations in the 15th Century

Many conquerors came to the Caucasus with different methods: hypocrisy and/or violence were the characteristic features of all the conquerors. However, at the very decisive moments it managed to find ways out of tragic circumstances.

The fall of Constantinople accelerated the global-historical progress, but still, it negatively affected the Georgian statehood and its cultural development, since it was culturally and economically separated from Western-European cultural space.

Creation of a hostile environment for Georgia started with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, thus "The road to civilization was blocked for the East" and ended with the Peace of Amasya signed between the Ottoman and Persian Empires in 1555, when Georgia was literally divided into two parts. From this period, the fate of Georgia was changed as it was divided into kingdoms and principalities (Khundadze & Kikilashvili, 2012).

The only way to communicate with the European countries was through Russia. The first contact of Georgians with Poland was after the fall of Constantinople, as a political motivation of creating a coalition against the Ottoman Empire. The Russian Empire appeared as the main factor in the relations of these two countries.

Polish-Georgian Relations in the 16th and 17th Centuries

Sources about the diplomatic relations between Georgia and Poland in the 16th century are almost non-existent and have not been discovered yet. Iase Tsintsadze in his book "Materials for the history of relations between Poland and Georgia in XV-XVII Centuries" writes about Stephen Báthory, who believed

that it was the right time for Georgians, Circassians and Persians to implement the plans - to conquer Moscow and lay siege to Turkey (Tsintsadze, 1966).

Stephen Báthory - King of Poland-Lithuania is an important figure in the history of Poland of the 16th century. It is known that Stephen Báthory defeated Russia in the Livonian campaign. Thanks to these victories, the ruling circles of Poland began to draw up a plan for the total subjugation of the Russian state (Tsintsadze, 1966).

From the reports of the 17th century Polish-Georgian relationship, the report about Georgian diplomat Bogdan Gurdzicki is of an interest. Giorgi Zedgenidze cites an interesting material and new facts from the Georgian-Polish relationship in his work "From the history of diplomatic relations of Poland and Russia to Iran (the work of Bogdan Gurdzicki)", where he emphasizes that Bogdan was a Polish diplomat of Georgian origin, who served as Polish ambassador in Isfahan for several years (Zedgenidze, 1971).

Episodic Relations Between Poland and Georgian in the 18th Century

Between 15th-18th centuries there was an episodic relationship between Georgia and Poland.

There are no traces of Georgian-Polish relations in the 18th century. It is known that in these centuries both states suffered from severe economic and political hardships. If Georgia in the second half of the 18th century suffered from the invasions of Iran and Dagestanis, Polish state was surrounded by the three large aggressive states: Russia, Prussia, Austria-Hungary and finally, by the end of the 18th century, it was divided by all three mentioned countries.

As we can see, both states went through extreme difficulties in the mentioned centuries, as both of them were struggling to maintain their political independence. That's why it is understandable why the

diplomatic relationship between Poland and Georgia has declined (Khundadze & Kikilashvili, 2012).

In the 16th and 18th centuries, Poland represented a powerful state of the Central Europe, but in the second half of the 18th century it suffered destruction, which eventually led to the disappearance of its nation-statehood. The fall of Poland was caused not only by its neighbors - Russia, Prussia, Austria and their predatory politics, but also its internal situation, in particular, the crisis of feudal farming together with the monarchy crisis. It is true that in the 18th century, hundreds of manufactories arose in Poland and all of them were created by the large Polish capital, but the development of capitalist relations was hindered by the underdeveloped feudal mode of production and the existing class system.

Neither Russia nor Prussia wanted to strengthen Poland. They agreed to divide almost all Polish land among themselves.

In 1804-1805, European events raised the issue of Poland, as the country gained extremely important strategical position in the international relations. Napoleon and Alexander I aspired to gain influence and power in Central Europe. The result of these events was the creation the Polish Kingdom, which was connected to Russia through constitution (Khundadze & Kikilashvili, 2012).

We can say that the relations between Polish and Georgian people before the 18th century was characterized by the creation of a common front against a common enemy – Ottoman Empire, as from the 19th century, the relationship between the two nations was determined by the pursuit of freedom and uncompromising struggle against the common enemy – Russian Empire.

Polish-Georgian Relations in the First Half of the 19th century

In 1783, according to the Georgievsky Treatise, the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (Eastern Georgia) entered the Russia's protectorate. According to the provisions of treatise, Russian Emperor gave a guarantee of leaving the reign of Heraclius II (King of Kakheti from 1744 to 1762, and of Kartli and Kakheti from 1762 until 1798) and his successors on the throne of Kartli-Kakheti unchanged and protecting the country from the external threats, while Heraclius II promised to break all relations with other states and accept the protectorate of the Russian emperor.

In Georgian historiography, there are two cardinaly opposite opinions about the treatise: the first point of view belongs to Iv. Javakhishvili, according to whom this treaty did nothing good to the Georgian statehood (Javakhishvili, 1919). From the second point of view - representatives of the Soviet historiography justified this treatise by a simple logic: "there was no other option", although they tried to avoid the main point here, that this "inevitable" situation was the result of Russian diplomacy and the Armenian lobby around Heraclius (Khundadze & Kikilashvili, 2012).

The treaty was a great success for Russia, through which it firmly established its positions in the Caucasus.

So, by the beginning of the XIX century, Georgia was annexed by the Russian troops. All official or non-official agreements were neglected.

Georgian political figures of the 18th century blindly trusted the idea of unanimity as they finally gave up the last bits of independence (of Georgia). But the struggle of Georgian people for liberation became even more tense, more complicated, it seemed there was no solution to the problem. This was a bloody and difficult road, but also full of hope and faith.

Since the 1930s, national intelligentsia has appeared on the official scene, the liberation movement was emerged, the main purpose of which was to fight against the Russian dominance.

In the first half of the 19th century, Russia "successfully" annexed the Kingdom of Poland and

Eastern Georgia. It turned Georgia into its province, and gave Eastern Poland a royal status.

The Russian administration "cared" for the "younger brother" and began to settle many foreigners (Poles, among them) in the Georgian territory, so that the Georgian nation would not become extinct due to its small population.

Different strata of Polish immigrants appeared in Georgia in the first half of the 19th century for different reasons. They were occupying high Administrative positions in the official hierarchy: e.g. Graf Paskevich, A. S. Griboyedov-Grzybowski, P. D. Závileisky (Khundadze & Kikilashvili, 2012).

As it is known, in the 19th century, both states were included into the Russian Empire. No research or document about this issue of Polish and Georgian history has been published, however, the 19th century Georgian historical Studies included certain materials about Georgia-Poland relations.

There are many sources and documents on the Georgia-Poland relationship in the first half of the 19th century scattered in the main archives of the former Russian Empire. In this context, we should mention Giorgi Gozalishvili's three-volume publication about the plot of 1832 (Gozalishvili, 1935). The basic material that can provide us with specific information on the relationship between these two nations is kept in the archives of Moscow.

Quite an extensive material is preserved in the memoirs. Immigrant Poles who visited Georgia at different times did a good deed, and left memories during their stay in Georgia (Caucasus). Here, we should mention Stanislav Nowadsky's memories of his stay in Georgia during 1813-15 Napoleonic wars (Khundadze & Kikilashvili, 2012).

In the documents describing the construction of the military road, the surname of St. Nowadsky's does not appear anywhere, however, as we know, Poles under the Russian supervision took part in the construction of the Georgian military road.

There is no special research about the relationship between Georgian and Polish people in

the Georgian historiography of the first half of the 19th century.

In this respect, some information could be found in philological science. The works conducted by the Georgian researchers give us a solid idea of what kind of literary and cultural relations were established between Georgian intelligentsia and the emigrant Poles in the 19th century. In this sense, the works of Otkheli and J. Chelidze (Chelidze, 1975) give us a sense on what kind of a literary and cultural relationship existed between Georgian intelligentsia and Polish immigrants.

Polish historiography has dedicated many excellent researches about those compatriots who were forced to leave Poland. One of the first works which describes their activities in Georgia, is a monograph of the famous Polish orientalist Jan Reychman: "Polish Travelers in the Middle East in the 19th century". The author tells us about the impressions and adventures of Polish travelers in Iran, Turkey, in the Euphrates and Tigris basin countries, in the Caucasus. A special chapter is dedicated to Georgia, including some interesting maps (Reychman, 1972).

Since the 19th century, most parts of Poland and Georgia were included within the Russian Empire. If in the previous centuries, relations between these two countries were characterized by the desire to create coalition against the Ottomans, in the 19th century this relation takes a completely different form in terms of national liberation movement directed against Russian tsarist regime.

Poland was always giving an example of struggle for the national liberation and there was nothing strange in it, as it was the most developed country economically, compared to other states within the Russian Empire.

During the whole 19th century, Polish and Georgian people were fighting against Tsarist regime, which eventually resulted in the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy.

Polish-Georgian Relations between 1918-1991

After the weakening of the Tsarist regime, Georgia and Poland regained the long-awaited independence. Georgia became independent on the 26th of May 1918, after the October revolution, when the Bolsheviks seized power and civil war broke out in Russia. Poland regained independence on the 11th of November 1918. The architect of the Polish freedom movement and then chief of state – Jozef Pilsudski had a Prometheanist vision of European security, which meant to weaken the Tsarist regime by supporting independence movements within the Russian Empire. One of the principal directions of this security policy was Georgia (Jokhadze, 2020).

Pilsudski noticed the strategic importance of Georgia. He was sure that Georgia should play a crucial role in enhancing peace and stability on the old continent. That is why Poland swiftly recognized the independence of Georgia and established the diplomatic mission in 1920. The head of the Polish mission was Tytus Filipowicz, who aimed to create a Polish-Georgian military alliance. Unfortunately, this plan was deranged because of the Soviet invasion in Georgia. On the 25th of February 1921, the Russian army annexed the country once again (Jokhadze, 2020).

After the dissolution of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) the government managed to escape and established Government in exile in Paris. After the events of 1921, many Georgians emigrated to Poland. Between 1922 and 1924, many Georgian Junkers joined the Polish army and became prominent military figures.

The most famous officers were Zakaria Bakradze, Aleksandre Chkeidze and Ivane Kazbegi. It is quite interesting, that among other emigrated soldiers, there was Dimitri Shalikashvili, whose son – Jon Malkhaz Shalikashvili became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is one of the highest military ranks in the United States of America. Besides that,

Shalikashvili served as a Supreme Allied Commander of Europe in 1993-94; his contribution in building Georgian-American military relations is really significant (Georgian Association in the United States of America, 2017).

In the aftermath of World War II, one of the victories – the Soviet Union descended so-called “Iron Curtain” in Eastern Europe. Poland, among other Eastern European countries, became a satellite of the USSR. Poland regained independence only in 1989 when the USSR was quite weak to contain velvet revolutions. A little later, in 1991, Georgia regained independence too. Nearly two centuries of Russian dictatorship was over. But Kremlin’s aggressive intentions did not disappear (Jokhadze, 2020).

Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

Diplomatic relations between Poland and Georgia re-established in 1992. From this point, Poland became the key strategic ally and partner of Georgia, which cordially supports the independence and territorial integrity of Georgia, as well as the country’s Euro-Atlantic Aspiration. An apparent illustration of Georgia’s strategic importance for Poland is the National Security Strategy 2020 which boldly emphasizes Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration as its top foreign policy priority.

Poland fully supports Georgia’s desire to join NATO. Warsaw is the contact state between NATO and Georgia.

According to the ambassador of Poland in Georgia – Mariusz Maszkiewicz – this decision will significantly increase the NATO presence in Georgia and improve bilateral relations between Poland and Georgia.

Lech Kaczynski was posthumously honored with an award of National Hero of Georgia for “showing heroism in defending Georgia’s interests” internationally. Important is to note about Kaczynski’s role during the August, 2008, when he, along with presidents of Ukraine and Lithuania, as well as PMs

from Latvia and Estonia arrived in Tbilisi in show of support.

“If I had to name who played an amazing role in terms of fighting for Georgia’s freedom, for Georgia’s future, I would put President Kaczynski very high in that gallery. And that’s not an exaggeration. I think my countrymen feel that way. We have seen his courage, we have seen his personal commitment,” this is what the third President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili said in an interview with CNN in 2010 (civil.ge.archives, 2010). “I think ultimately, what he achieved, the legacy he leaves behind in terms of emotions, politics, human relations, the warmth of his heart... will outlast everything else and that will be something, that will stay for generations and generations,” (civil.ge.archives, 2010).

Besides the military and economic cooperation, there is a significant economic interest between the two countries. In 2014, Georgia signed DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement), which allowed the country to get access to the European market. Consequently, Georgia’s export and import to the EU have significantly

increased during the last years. In 2009 Georgia’s export to Poland was \$ 3.6 million, while for 2018, this number grew four times (\$16million) (trading economics, 2023).

Georgia Exports to Poland was US\$47.13 million during 2022 (while for 2018, this number was \$16 million), according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade (trading economics, 2023).

Conclusion

To summarize, we can boldly say that the Polish-Georgian bond is a clear example of extremely friendly relations between the two countries. Poland and Georgia have deep historical, economic, and cultural ties (Georgian Journal, 2022). They share universal values of democracy and human rights. There are very few precedents when geographically separated and ethnically different people establish such kind of relations. Georgia, as well as Poland, should try to preserve and further deepen this special bond in the future.

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