

RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH GEORGIA SINCE 1991

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We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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DR. TULSI RAM
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**To
My Late Grandfather**

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PREFACE

The disintegration of the Soviet Union is an unprecedented development of our times, and as such, it has rightly attracted attention all over the world. The behaviour of new Russia towards the other newly independent sovereign states is of immense importance for understanding the international politics of post-Soviet Union region. Georgia is strategically located and economically important for Russian scheme of things. At the same time, Georgia is important for Russia to control the highly unstable Trans-Caucasus region. This study is a modest attempt to analyse the Russo-Georgian relations in this context.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I deals with an emerging framework of Russian foreign policy vis-a-vis Georgia. The situation after the break-up, the strategic and economic aspect of Georgia in relations with Russia has been discussed. It also traces the background of Russo-Georgian relations and how NATO has affected Russian foreign policy.

The second chapter deals with the rise of nationalist movements in Georgia. Emergence of Gamsakhurdia and his policy is the major theme of this chapter. People's reaction to his various policies has also been analysed.

The next chapter discusses the causes of ethnic conflicts in Georgia, i.e., South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's role and its impact on these conflicts, and, how the Russo-Georgian relations got shaped by these have been discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter contains discussion about the arrival of Shevardnadze in Georgia and the hopes he generated of good relations with Russia. Various treaties, expansion of NATO, pipeline politics and nuclear issues, and how these issues affected the Russo-Georgian relations have been discussed in this chapter.

The final chapter deals with an overall assessment of Russia's relations with Georgia.

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This work has been made possible with the cooperation of many people. The debts are legion.

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Language has it's own barriers, hence my words will not be able to express the contribution of my parents; who stood by me in all turbulent times.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The USSR, which put for the first time the idea of socialism into practice and gave powers to the proletariat class disintegrated dramatically in 1991. The sudden collapse of the USSR in December 1991 created fifteen new sovereign independent but politically and economically unstable countries around the Russian Federation. Russia became the real heir of the Soviet Union, inheriting the latter's standing in the international arena in the form of a seat in the U.N.. Security Council and as a member of the Nuclear Weapons states club and with its comparatively stronger economy than other states of former Soviet Union. This completely new and unprecedented situation, with a new state and a new ideological perspective, necessitated a re-thinking in the sphere of foreign policy of Russia. Russian foreign policy since the collapse of the USSR has had elements of both continuity and change in comparison to the Soviet days. The dominant socialist ideology which was the corner-stone of the Soviet foreign policy for more than seven decades came to end in the new situation. Now more emphasis has been on securing the national interest as defined in a primarily capitalist and democratic society. Some semblance of the old order was sought to be maintained via the creation

of the Commonwealth of Independent States,¹ (CIS).

The immediate response of the foreign policy makers in Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union was a strong pro-west policy. This was defined as Andrei Kozyrev factor in Russian foreign policy. Kozyrev was the leading proponent of pro-westernism². Internal economic chaos within Russia led to this approach. It was not until mid-1993 that a new line of thought started developing and the focus shifted to the states of former Soviet Union, which has since been called the "Near Abroad", as a priority area. One of the reasons for this shift was the disillusionment with the West. It was quite obvious that the hopes of acquiring new allies, foremost in the West had not materialized. Also the U.S. led West failed to provide the much needed economic assistance to Russian economy. So this approach lost favour and receded into the background. Also, internal opposition which accused Yeltsin of having compromised on Russian sovereignty, was demanding a more assertive foreign policy.

The new situation called for emphasis on realpolitik, the

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1. The CIS was created on December 21, 1991 in Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan. It represented an expansion of a commonwealth of Slavic states composed of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, founded on December 8, 1991, the date of the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union. The three Baltic states and Georgia refused membership in the CIS, from the start. Azerbaijan withdrew from the CIS in 1992. Since then Georgia has joined and Azerbaijan has rejoined the CIS.
 2. Leszek Buszynski, "Russian foreign policy after the cold war", (London, Praeger Publishers, 1996) P.5.

hallmark of which in the Russian situation was a rapid economic decline. The focus soon shifted to the states of the "Near Abroad". The term 'Near Abroad' was coined by Russian in 1992 to refer to the fourteen states that once were Russia's fellow republics in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics³.

Towards the mid-1993 some clear contours regarding the relations with the Republics of former Soviet Union would be seen. It was during this time that it was realised that Russia's first priority lied in its own background. There gradually emerged a consensus that Russia must define and defend its own interests in the region, especially in central Asia and Caucasus. Several reasons and several dynamics have contributed to this policy shift of Russia⁴—

First, the sheer realization that the security of Russia and these states are mutually interdependent; as these young states with weak economies, unstable political systems and no independent defence capability have become vulnerable to external pressure and penetration.

Second, the growing concern over the ethnic factor in the overall security of the CIS and Russia in particular was

3. Peter Shearman, "Russian Foreign Policy since 1990". (San Francisco, Westview Press, 1995), P.53.

4. Mohaiaddin Mesbahi, "Russian foreign policy and security in central Asia and the caucasus", Central Asian Survey, 12(2), 1993, pp. 181-215.

another and essential factor in refocusing Russian policy. Protection of the basic rights of Russian minorities in these regions and the real possibility of military clashes with the republics over this issue demanded much closer relation with these republics.

Third, the growing influence of more centrist conservative political forces in the Russian government and especially the reassertion of the army role in defining Russia's general security requirements, were important changes which brought new inputs to the formulation of Russian security policy; demanding a renewed and focused attention towards Russia's southern border. In a major change, President Yeltsin himself said, "The time for the eastward move has arrived".⁵

Fourth, the concern over the 'Islamic threat', while all along present in Central Asia and Caucasus now demanded some practical measures. Particularly Iran and Turkey, emerged as a major player in this region, with their social and political interests.

The Russian policy-shift towards its southern flank has been reflected in a two-prong strategy—

(a) The reintegration of Central Asian, Caucasian and Russian

5. Moscow Russian Television, interview with Boris Yeltsin by Izvestiya, FBIS-SOV, 92-137, 16 July, 1992, pp. 18-22.

security within the institutional context of the CIS and,
(b) simultaneously, pursuing bilateral security arrangements with individual states in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The southern flank of Russia between Black Sea and Caspian Sea comprises of three Transcaucasian independent states — Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Georgia covers an area of 69,700 Sq. Km. with a population of 5,400,841 comprising three autonomous regions i.e. – Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Azaria.⁶

Georgia was a powerful kingdom during medieval times. But subsequently came under periods of foreign domination. Lastly, Georgia annexed by the Russian Empire during the 19th century. After the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, Georgia became independent and ruled by a Menshevik socialist government. But in early 1921, Georgia was invaded by Bolshevik troops and became a Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1922, it became a part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR). In 1936, Georgia became a full union republic when the TSFSR was disbanded. During Soviet period Georgia became a subject of Russification especially under Stalin period. Georgians demonstrated their anger from time to time, which were

6. Paul B. Henze, "The demography of the caucasus according to 1989 Soviet census data", Central Asian Survey (London), Vol 10, No. 112, 1991, pp. 148-154.

suppressed by the Soviet forces.

✓ Though Georgia declared its independence on 9 April 1991, it effectively emerged as an independent state after the collapse of the Soviet Union right in the midst of elite and ethnic conflicts.

The dawn of competitive election in Georgia led to the domination of the nationalists in the new Supreme Soviet of Georgia which in turn elected a Georgian chauvinist to the post of the chairman of the elected body. Later on, a referendum was held in Georgia in which 93 Percent people voted in favour of separation from the Soviet Union and Zviad Gamsakhurdia was appointed as the president of Georgia by its Supreme Soviet. Georgia appeared having one of the most enthusiastic independent movements with anti-Russian sentiments after the Baltic states in the Soviet Union. The new Supreme Soviet of Georgia dominated by nationalists fervour adopted new laws such as prohibiting the conscription of Georgians into the Soviet army. Georgia also demanded the withdrawal of the Russian forces stationed in Georgia from its territory. After the collapse of the USSR, the independent Georgia refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States and continued its insistence on its independence and keeping distance from Russia.

The policies of Gamsakhurdia caused bitter relations

between Russia and Georgia. The eruption of ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic Georgia provided a tool for Russia to put pressure on Georgia. The aggressive policies against Georgian minorities, particularly under Gamsakhurdia was a major cause for these ethnic conflicts.

Russia wanted to get rid of Gamsakhurdia. During this crucial juncture, Edward Shevardnadze was still living in Moscow. It is interesting to note that the Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Shevardnadze had been in the same party i.e., the Communist Party of Soviet Union and in the same government before the disintegration. It is a well known fact that Mr. Shevardnadze was the famous foreign minister during Gorbachev regime, when Yeltsin was a junior minister in the same cabinet. Russia saw a better ally in Shevardnadze. It is quite clear from this fact that the Russian leadership had got a better opportunity to deal with Gamsakhurdia by putting Shevardnadze in power. It happened so, and Shevardnadze assumed power in Georgia with the help of Russia at a very crucial juncture during the civil war in which Gamsakhurdia was ousted.

Under these circumstances it was anticipated that both the countries would enjoy good neighbourly relations. However, their relationship could not develop on expected lines and it may be defined as 'love and hate' relationship between the

two. Though both the countries had emerged from the same old Soviet legacy both were Socialist Republics within the monolithic framework of the union of Soviet socialist Republics. Therefore the problem faced by both the countries after the disintegration of the USSR are almost identical. However the assumption of super power status by Russia made a big difference in the bilateral relations.

✓The ethnic conflicts was a major issue between Russia and Georgia. South Ossetia, which proclaimed itself a separate republic in 1990, broken a new ground of conflict with Georgia, which further deteriorated the Russo-Georgian relations. Russia took the side of Ossetia. Russia said that the attacks on the population of South Ossetia were a massacre and should stop immediately. Not only this, Russia also conducted bomb attacks on the military bases of the Georgia in the garb of security for the Russians there. The relationship between Russia and Georgia after this became very strained. Perceiving this condition, efforts were made by Shevardnadze and Yeltsin to remove the contentions. As a first step a ceasefire agreement was signed in July 1992.³

Similarly in Abkhazia after breaking out of ethnic conflicts, Russia sent troops in the name of protecting military instalments. The Georgian troops pushed back the Abkhazian rebels initially but later on the rebels captured many areas. Georgia considered it to be the result of

Russian support. After the capture of Sukhumi by the Abkhaz rebels in 1993, the Russo-Georgian relations became even more strained.

✓ Later on, in December 1993 peace talks were started in Geneva through the UN intervention. This led to the signing of the peace agreement between the Georgians and the Abkhazians in May 1994. Georgia joined the CIS and its collective security system, a step which it had declined to take, till then, in the same year.]

✓ Geo-strategically, Georgia is very important to Russia. It is adjacent to Iran and Turkey, who have socio-political interests in the transcaucasian region. Georgia also provides route to the oil rich Caspian region and the Black Sea which have strategic and economic importance. So, Russia wanted Georgia in CIS for economic and strategic reasons. Russia had also adopted some sort of economic blockade strategy to put pressure on Georgia. The joining of Georgia in CIS has led to a transformation in the relations between the two and has been marked by active co-operation in all fields, both economic, strategic and political.

The expansion of NATO towards east has created a very embarrassing situation for the Russian foreign policy makers. NATO wants to encircle and isolate the Russia by admitting the countries into its fold, surrounding Russia. The attempt

of the USA to create a unipolar world under her leadership is unacceptable to Russia, who sees signs of such a world all around herself. The three recent developments that proved the Russia's apprehension are – one, the entry of the erstwhile communist countries – Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic, in the NATO⁷; two, the presence of NATO forces in Bosnia; and third, the use of military forces by NATO on Yugoslavia as the solution to the 'Kosovo crisis' in the phase of a universal outrage by the international community and, specifically the heavy opposition from Russia.

Many countries of the CIS such as Baltic States and Ukraine want to join NATO. The newly independent countries, due to their weak economic and military strength get lured by the NATO and other western institutions such as the European Union. The NATO and the EU in their attempt to act as magnets for the overall development of these newly independent countries are being seen by Russia as potential irritants in this region. While Russia is the largest and the strongest of the regional actors, it no longer dominates the scene. Its current troubles have opened up a large breathing space for other states of the region. Even the smallest and the weakest of the parties have got enough room to manouvre.

7. Poland, Hungary and Czech given full membership of NATO on 12 March, 1999, Hindu, (New Delhi), 13 March 1999.

✓Due to the Geo-strategic compulsions, the Russian stakes in this region are enormously high⁸. The proposed expansion of the NATO would deprive Russia of many strategic vital sea routes. It would have an adverse impact on the Russian naval power that had already been weakened in the wake of disintegration. Beside this, the CIS countries are acting as a part of its extended security zone. These lands have traditionally fallen securely within Russian sphere of influence. Untill 1991 they were, for most of the past 100 years and in some cases longer, part of the Russian empire and Soviet Union. Thus, Russia sees these states not only as part of a zone of vital interest but as areas still deeply inter-connected to it by history, culture and ethnic ties. The presence of a large number of Russians in this region makes the Russian foreign policy overtly concerned about the maintenance of the leading status of the culture and the languages of the ethnic Russians in these states?

✓Russia also has economic interests in this region. The key pipelines, linking the Russian gas and oil supplies with the European market, are very important for the Russian economy and will certainly go away from Russia if the NATO becomes an actor in this region. Russia also depends heavily on the Estonian and the Latvian ports for much of its trade with

8. Michael Mandelbaum, "The New Russian Foreign Policy", (A council on foreign relations book, New York 1998), P.83.

Europe. The wonderfully innovated NATO's "partnership for peace" programme is also viewed as having undesirable consequence for the Russian economy, since the participants will be encouraged to adopt the NATO's specification for their military equipments⁹. This will further reduce the interests of East European countries in Russian arms and will thus weaken the ailing Russian military industry.

Understandably, Russia does not want the CIS countries to join the NATO. The proposed expansion of NATO further strengthened the nationalists in the Russian foreign policy. Russia's nationalist view is to oppose the NATO enlargement and to support for the Russian-led integration on the territory of the former USSR. Yeltsin himself has offered joint Russian-Western security guarantees as an alternative to NATO membership¹⁰.

But it is also a fact that Russia can not stop the erstwhile communist countries from joining the NATO. This is why Russia is bent upon persuading the CIS countries to refrain from joining the NATO. The alternative before her is to improve her neighbourly relationship with the countries of the CIS.

Georgia's post-Soviet existence has put it as an

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

independent actor on the world stage, though it is still grappling with several vital issues related to it. The nation building processes and national interests are yet to be defined. Georgia inherited a ruined economy along with unstable political institutions. Georgia's foreign policy orientation has shown a shift from pro-West to regional economic co-operation. The realization that western aid would be difficult to acquire and dissociating from regional economies would further cripple its economy which made Georgia slowly integrate into the CIS.

The present study is intended to analyse the relations between Russia and Georgia in the post-Soviet era, taking into consideration the areas of agreements as well as differences, which have been marked by many historic developments in both the countries. The study is covering the developments between the two countries since 1991 to the present time.

The present study is based on historical, comparative and analytical approach to the subject. Mainly secondary source materials have been used in writing the dissertation. These include books, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers etc. Besides primary sources have also been consulted.

CHAPTER - II

RUSSO-GEORGIAN RELATIONS DURING POST-SOVIET DISINTEGRATION PERIOD UNDER GAMSAKHURDIA'S NATIONALIST REGIME

At last Soviet Union broke into fifteen Republics. Aspirations of various nationalities were a major cause of the disintegration. In Georgia too, the nationalistic mood was on upswing. During the 1930s the Georgians were particularly subject to persecution under the Soviet leader Stalin, who himself was an ethnic Georgian. The first victims had been the opponents of Stalin, when he was a revolutionary leader in Georgia. But later the persecution became more indiscriminate. Ethnic discrimination and attack on nationalism went hand in hand with an aggressive promotion of Russian culture and nationalism. Despite the Soviet policy, Georgians retained a strong national identity.

When Gorbachev came to power, he was aware of the economic and social problems which beset the country. But despite Ukrainian blood on his mother's side, he appeared largely ignorant of the nationality question¹. This may have been because he had never held a political office outside the Russian federation. His early speeches on this issue were conservative and contrasted markedly with his reformist attitudes on most other domestic issues. As late as 1987 he

1. Archie Brown, "The Gorbachev factor", (Oxford University Oxford Press, 1996), pp. 256-7.

was still repeating the Brezhnev line that the nationality question had been settled².

The few demonstrations of national discontent in the first years of Gorbachev administration could be dismissed as isolated and unrepresentative cases. But as the nationalist movement spread and radicalised from 1988, this position became untenable. Gorbachev came to acknowledge that nationalism was a problem, but argued that nationalist demands could be satisfied within the frame work of Perestroika. His Glasnost allowed the articulation and dissemination of nationalist views. The practical effect of democratisation and economic reforms was the devolution of power from the center. Gorbachev also welcomed the articulation of nationalist views as a sign of perestroika in action. He even encouraged the formation of the nationalist popular fronts which began to emerge since 1988³.

Initially the popular fronts gained Gorbachev's support by adopting the terminology of Perestroika. However it soon became clear that they had a different and more radical agenda. Devolution was not enough, the nationalists wanted sovereignty. Sovereignty for the majority of nationalists did not mean independence, but simply that the Republican law

2. Soviet News, 27 Sept., 1987.

3. David, Pryce-Jones, "The war that never was : The fall of the Soviet empire, 1985-1991", (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), p.172

should take priority over the Union law. Nevertheless, in the context of the USSR, this remained a revolutionary demand, which challenged the future existence of the Union. Estonia was the first Republic to declare sovereignty in November 1988, but by October 1990 all the Union Republic had followed the suit⁴.

Rise of Gamsakhurdia and nationalist movement in Georgia:—

Georgia has a long history of nationalist upsurge during the Soviet Rule. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was the popular leader of this national movement, having symbolised resistance to Moscow for over 30 years. He was born in 1939, into the family of Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, who was the Georgia's most gifted twentieth-century novelist. Zviad was first arrested in 1956 at the age of 17 for distributing leaflets in Tbilisi calling for Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union. A specialist in American literature at Tbilisi state university, he rapidly became one of the Georgia's most well-known dissidents. During the early 1970s he compiled "Samizdat" documents on the use of torture in Georgian prisons, corruptions within the Georgian orthodox Church, and the destruction of historic monuments of Georgia.

4. Mike Bowker, "Russian foreign policy and the end of the cold war", (England, Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1997), p.47.

From its very beginning, the Georgian movement for national independence became dominated by the wing which called itself as “irreconcilable” or “radical”⁵. The radical movement was born out of Soviet dissident practices. In these practices the main point was to make protest action seen by western reporters and to make it publicised in the western media, and especially radio broadcastings to the Soviet Union, (VOA, Radio Liberty, B.B.C. etc.)⁶. Since the Soviet authorities really did not like this kind of publicity, these tactics worked to a certain extent.

Gamsakhurdia and another popular dissident leader Merab Kostava soon publicised their claims and made contacts with the Russian dissident movement and the Western Press. In 1974 he was a co-founder with Merab Kostava of the Georgian Initiative Group for Human Rights. In 1976 he founded the Georgian Helsinki Watch Group to observe human rights violations in Georgia. Gamsakhurdia wrote numerous articles complaining of the condition of Georgian national monuments and the illegal deportation of Georgian Muslims (the Meskhians) to central Asia. He also criticised the central governments for the illegal arrest of his colleagues. He was arrested in April 1977 for anti-Soviet

5. Alexei, Bruno and Dmitri Trenin, “Commonwealth and Independence in Post Soviet Eurasia”, (Britain Frenkcass, - 1998), p.21.

6. Ibid

propaganda. After more than a year in prison, Gamsakhurdia was tried and sentenced to three years in prison and two in exile⁷. In July 1979, Gamsakhurdia was granted a pardon⁸.

Corruption and misadministration were also a cause for rise of nationalism in Georgia. A large scale upsurge of dissidents against corruption was held in 1972⁹. In the next two years more than 25,000 people were arrested. Even Amnesty International criticised this barbaric action of Soviet rule¹⁰.

Although this dissident nationalism did not spread widely in Georgia, and Gamsakhurdia and his associates were easily isolated from the population, their activity illustrated developing tendencies within the Georgian people.

Though the short-term aims were attainment of economic autonomy and creating people awareness, the ultimate goal of the nationalist movement was to get total independence. The movements were sparked in September 1988 by a green issue. People were against of a huge hydro-electric project which would have submerged historic sites.

7. New York Times, (New York) 20 May 1978.

8. The current digest of the Soviet press, no.27, 1 Aug, 1979.

9. Geoffrey ponton, "The Soviet era, Soviet politics for Lenin to Yeltsin". (Oxford Press, 1994), p.24.

10. Ibid.

In November 1988, more than 30,000 people demonstrated against this project. People's anger further increased when Union government brought a change in the Soviet constitution concerning the republic's right of secession and the authorities' power to intervene directly 'in the case of threat'. It ended when Moscow announced concessions. Nevertheless, the nationalist feelings were still very strong. Further independence demonstrations took place in February 1989 in spite of warning from the Police that they were illegal. Amidst all of these movements Gamsakhurdia became a symbol of independence. The death of Kostava in a car accident in October 1989 left Gamsakhurdia, the most popular leader of the Georgian nationalist movement, alone¹¹.

The time between 1988 to 1990 is the period of the high rise of the national independence movement in Georgia. The Perestroika and Glasnost allowed the formation of many unofficial groups in Georgia. Such groups became prominent as time passed. There was one thing for which Georgia was notable more than any other Soviet republic. Georgia was the only place among these republics where the pro-independence movement was dominated by the 'radicals'. National rejection of any compromise with the projected 'enemy' (Russia) was the trade mark of these radical groups.

11. Ian Bremmer, Taras Ray, "New State, New Politics : Building the Post Soviet Nations" (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.521.

This rejection practically resulted in failures to achieve any compromise between different factors of the national independence movement, whether between radicals and moderates or between various radical groups. It was this confrontational character of political discourse and activities that was primarily responsible for the different kinds of conflicts that eventually developed in Georgia. These conflicts between various political groups and factions in due course of time led to a kind of civil war, as well as the ethnic conflicts and, in part, especially strong tensions with Russia¹².

The nationalist sentiments reached its culmination, when on 9th April, 1989, Soviet troops launched a brutal attack on demonstrators outside the main government building in Tbilisi. Nineteen people, mostly teenage girls and elderly women, were killed and hundred were injured¹³. This incident served as a catalyst and became the turning point in Georgia's fight for independence. It was here that communist regime in Georgia lost its nerve and all the residues of its legitimacy. Now the question was not whether Georgia would break away from the Soviet Union, but how and when.

12. Bodie C. William, "Anarchy and Cold War in Moscow's Near Abroad", Strategic Review, Vol.21, No.1, Winter 1993, p.48.

13. Elizabeth fuller, "Georgia since Independence plus ca change", Current History, vol.92, No.576, Oct.93, pp.342-346.

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The dawn of competitive election in Georgia led to the domination of the nationalists in the new Supreme Soviet of Georgia in November 1990. Gamsakhurdia's Round Table-Free Georgia bloc received 54 percent of the vote and won a total 155 out of 250 seats in the new Parliament. It shows how popular he was. As one defeated rival commented, "any party would have won, that was headed by Zvaid Gamsakhurdia"¹⁴. The communist party came second with 64 seats. The new post communist Parliament elected Gamsakhurdia as chairman at its inaugural session. Tengiz Sigua, elected Prime Minister, who was the former director of the Metallurgy Institute in Tbilisi.

Gamsakhurdia's Policies and Russo-Georgian Relations:—

After the overwhelming support and with nationalist dominated new Supreme Soviet, Gamsakhurdia passed several controversial laws. He declared the supermacy of Georgian laws over all-Union laws. He also declared illegal the conscription of Georgian into the Soviet armed forces. Not only this, even before the fall of the Soviet Union Gamsakhurdia established Georgia's own army the 'National Guard' Many young Georgians reported to have joined in this army. Many symbolic gestures of independence were also

14. Elizabeth Fuller, "Georgian politics and the Gamsakhurdia factor", (paper presented in the national convention of the American association for the advancement of slavie studies), in phoenix, Ariz, 19 Nov. 1992.

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adopted. Gamsakhurdia named Georgia as the Republic of Georgia. It is very important that this name has no reference to Soviet or Socialist or Revolutionary. A new white, black and cornelian coloured flag was adopted as the official flag of Georgia. Many civil and criminal codes were amended as they were the legacy of the communist Soviet Union¹⁵. It shows how Gamsakhurdia was filled with anti-Russian sentiments. Due to all these anti-Russian adventurists acts the Soviet Army headquarters in Moscow, warned him against the formation of the National Guard and the abolition of Soviet Army conscription in Georgia. But despite all this, Georgia formed a 12,000 strong Republican Guard on 30 January 1991. According to Tengiz Kitovani, the first commander of the National Guard, the primary aim was to counter armed criminals gangs, but it could also defend Georgia against attacks by the Soviet Army. Gamsakhurdia further said that the central government could not treat Georgia like the Baltic States because Georgians were willing and able to fight¹⁶. Throughout, any action taken against Moscow by him, was greeted with unanimous acclaim.

Gamsakhurdia's insistence on independence and keeping

15. Stephen F. Jones, "New States New Politics, Building the Post. Soviet Nations", Ed. by Ian Bremmer, Ray Taras, (Cambridge University Press 1997), pp.505-543.

16. Geoffrey Ponton, "The Soviet era, Soviet politics from Lenin to Yeltsin", (Oxford Black well, 1994) p.249.

distance from Russia enabled him to take such steps which further enraged Russia. He officially boycotted the all-Union referendum on the future of the USSR, which was held in nine other Soviet Republics in March 1991. But this referendum was held in the autonomous territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where almost the entire non-Georgian population voted to preserve the union. Gamsakhurdia saw this act as a direct threat to the motherland i.e. the Republic of Georgia. He demanded the withdrawal of the Russian forces stationed in Georgia from its territory. Furthermore, he refused to participate in voting on a new union treaty draft. Instead of this, he conducted a referendum in Georgia on the question of independence and separation from Soviet Union on 31 March 1991. Of those eligible to vote, 95 percent participated in the referendum and 93 percent of whom voted for independence.

Following the referendum, the Georgian Supreme Soviet approved a decree formally restoring Georgia's independence on 9th April 1991. Georgia, thus, separated from the USSR. On 15th of April the Supreme Soviet elected Gamsakhurdia to newly established post of executive President. Then direct election were held on 26 May 1991 for the post of the President. Gamsakhurdia elected President with the 87 percent of the votes cast¹⁷. Thus he legitimised his position through

17. FBIS-SOV, 91-159, p.48.

democratic process with overwhelming majority, though voting did not take place in south Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Thus, all his acts embarked on a course of direct confrontation with Moscow. Gamsakhurdia refused to join the commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The prime objective of the formation of the CIS was to bind the now separated nations of the former Soviet Republic within a broad political, economic and strategic frame-work. It was all the more compelling for Russia to arrive at such a united framework, because the uncertain political scene and the fragile economic set-up made these nations very susceptible to external interference by the Western and the regional powers. Historically speaking, Russia was the natural heir to the erstwhile USSR; she gave prominence to the construction of the CIS. But Georgia's refusal to her entry into this CIS and maintain any kind of cooperation economic or military with Russia was one of the main factors that determined the contours of Russo-Georgian relations. As has been pointed out at the outset, the relationship between the two countries had been tense and hostile from the very beginning. However, as Georgia later joined the CIS under Shevardnadze, the relationship became normalised and friendly.

Further, the authoritarian rule of Gamsakhurdia, which led

to ethnic conflicts and civil war in Georgia, provided a good tool for Russia to intervene and to brought Georgia to her knees. The presence of sizeable number of ethnic Ossetians, Abkhazians and Russian minorities in Georgia made easy for Russia to work out its plan.

Gamsakhurdia pursued an extremely tough ethnic policy. He elaborated a theory of minority rights based on assumption that members of minorities with a relatively recent history of settlement in Georgia, such as the Ossetians and Azeris, do not qualify for right to residence in the Republic and for the equal status with the dominant ethnic group¹⁸. Earlier, during the campaign for independence in Georgia in March 1991, he had threatened to deprive those, who voted against independent Georgia, of citizenship.

Gamsakhurdia's ethnic policy based much on distinction between 'indigenous' and 'settlers'. Based on this distinction he abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia, in December 1990. This led to a bitter war between the Ossetians and the Georgians. He asserted that the Ossetians were illegally granted an autonomous region by the Bolsheviks in 1922 as a reward for their anti-Georgian activities¹⁹. He called on the South Ossetians to return to

18. FBIS-SOV, 91-214, p.71.

19. Ian Bremmer, Ray Taras, No.11, p.535.

their real homeland in neighbouring North Ossetia. The flight of the Ossetian refugees from the region, since the war began in December, partially fulfilled his agenda²⁰. Not only this, Gamsakhurdia promoted Christianization programme among the Azeris, and the Georgian Muslims. He also encouraged the mass baptism in Muslim areas by appointing Georgian Orthodox priests as government officials. The Azeris strongly opposed all of his misdeeds.

The nationalist Gamsakhurdia government's single-minded pursuit of Georgianization programme alienated the vast majority of the non-Georgian population in Georgia. He made ethnic quotas in parliament, with each ethnic group voting for its own ethnic deputies²¹. There were no seats for non-Georgians into the local bodies of the Georgia. The philosophy of majority rights encouraged a siege mentality, where any opposition to Georgian hegemony was seen as a threat to national unity and to the state's interests.

Outraged by all these acts, Russia began to oppose Gamsakhurdia. Russia took the side of ethnic minorities in Georgia and sent his troops for the security of the Russian minorities there²².

20. FBIS-SOV, 91-217, p.73.

21. FBIS-SOV, 91-186, pp.59-60.

22. The Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, vol.44, No.24, 1992, p.17.

Gamsakhurdia's new legislative programme and constitution was, literally speaking based on the Western model of pluralism. But it had nothing to do with the true spirit of democratic ideals of pluralism. For example, the law on political associations, made it relatively easy for the Ministry of Justice to refuse registration to any party organisation. All regional bodies were directly responsible to and appointed by the President. The local people had no say in it. The President could dismiss it as per his whims. The Centre controlled most part of the regional budget and the local appointments, which allowed the politicians at the Centre to build up their personal networks. They rapidly acquired a notoriety for corruption. This caused great resentments among the masses.

The President could cancel any resolution or order of the cabinet and its Prime Minister. There was no limitation on the number of terms for the President. He could declare various degrees of emergency rules, during which the legislature need not to be consulted at all.

The laws on the press was also very strict. Newspapers could be taken to court "for malevolently using freedom of press" and "spreading facts not corresponding to reality" or for printing "false and unchecked information"²³." Beside these,

23. Stephen F. Jones, No.15, p.523.

the government controlled the media by controlling paper supplies, personal appointments and by intimidation and closing papers. By the July 1991, there were only two independent newspapers. Many oppositionist papers were closed down. In August 1991 many Georgian journalists were arrested and all Russian newspapers were banned²⁴.

It shows that Gamsakhurdia, who created his image as a symbol of democracy, was infact a dictator. He had no respect for the basic tenets of democracy. His activities made his opponents come together to start a civil war, thereby, giving an opportunity to Russia to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs.

The democratic political culture stands for mutual trust, and set of values and norms which are shared and respected by all the political actors operating within the cultural milieu. But both the government of Georgia and its opponents showed their inability and unwillingness to operate within a democratic framework. Earlier the opposition of Gamsakhurdia were fragmented. The National Democratic Party of Gia Chanturia and the National Independence Party of Irakli Cereteli united themselves in the National Congress. They mobilised supporters onto the streets and organised hunger strikes to protest government policies. But all the

24. Izvestiya, 12 Sept., 1991 (Trans. in FBIS-SOV, 91-177, pp.88-90)

opposition leaders including Jaba Ioseliani and another prominent dissident leader of "Mkhedrioni" (Horsemen) were soon imprisoned without trial, and their parties disbanded²⁵.

Gamsakhurdia was also very critical of the Georgian intelligentsia. They were regularly insulted by the President as a false intelligentsia, with links to the Russian agents.

Throughout Gamsakhurdia's period in office, relations between the opposition and the government were characterised by intense animosity and an absence of consensus. The opposition parties resorted to boycotts, strikes, occupations, rallies and physical threats. Gamsakhurdia with overwhelming support in the Supreme Soviet and among electorate, felt no need to comprise or respond to the opposition. He branded these oppositions as "enemy of the people", "traitor to the nations" and "criminals"²⁶. He also compelled the Supreme Court to become loyal to him. Supreme Court approved many of his dubious decision and also failed to prevent the arrest of the opposition leaders.

During this type of environment of animosity, the situation changed in August 1991. During the failed Soviet coup attempt in August, Gamsakhurdia enforced the State of

25. Stephen F. Jones, "Glassnost, Perestroika and the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic", Armanian Review, Vol.43, No.2.3, 1990, pp.127-152.

26. Ibid.

Emergency. Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua and National Guard Commander Tengiz Kitovini were dismissed. After the coup had collapsed, Gamsakhurdia's position became tenuous. Suddenly all of his oppositions became united. Many members of his own party also defected him. But more important, more than 15,000 men of the National Guard also defected him, and went with the opposition.²⁷ In September 1991, thirty opposition parties united and demanded the resignation of Gamsakhurdia. They organised a series of anti-government demonstration. But, the situation became worse, when government troops killed some demonstrators. Gamsakhurdia again declared a state of emergency and established a National Security Council with wide ranging emergency powers²⁸. None of these measures were ratified as required by law by the Supreme Soviet. Thus ended any pretension that Supreme Soviet might have had about its capacity to resist presidential will. Gamsakhurdia forced all channels of power under his control.

In December 1991, armed conflict broke out in Georgia. All the opposition parties resorted to force to oust the President and organised direct action against the government. Armed troops under the Tengiz Kitovani and militiamen of Jaba Ioseliani's Horsemen group provided the main military

27. FBIS-SOV., 91-174, p.89.

28. FBIS-SOV., 91-214, p.72.

forces for the opposition. Opposition supporters occupied first the television station in Tbilisi, because it was used as a false propaganda machine by the government. Fighting was mostly confined to central Tbilisi, around the parliament building, where Gamsakhurdia was besieged. More than hundred people were believed to have been killed. Ultimately, Gamsakhurdia along with his supporters forced to fled from Georgia on 6 January 1992.

Though it was not certain whether Russia supported the opposition or not, the presence of Russian military in Georgia provide some suspicion about that. Gamsakhurdia accused Russia of supporting the forces against him²⁹. He said that Kremalin's infernal machine had activated with the help of Georgian traitors based in Moscow. He further urged the Georgian people to destroy those traitors and smash all the "enemies"³⁰. He accused the opposition of being a Moscow agents.

But there are some evidence to suggest Russia's indirect involvement in Georgia's civil war. For example, Gia Chanturia, the leader of opposition, was arrested on his way to Moscow during the civil war. He was supposedly on his way to address a press conference and to meet some

29. Izvestiya, 10 Sept. 1991, (Trans. in FBIS-SOV., 91-176, p.77)

30. Ibid.

Russian officials. As had been accused by the then Deputy Culture Minister of Georgia, Mr. Chanturia was responsible for plotting a coup against the Georgian President, in conjunction with Moscow³¹.

It is also true that Russian intelligentsia and media had aligned themselves with the anti-Gamsakhurdia opposition³². Their concern was that the President and his government were ignoring elementary rights, not only the rights of minorities but free speech and freedom of the press as well.

Gamsakhurdia also enraged Russia by his alliance with the ethnic separatists of Southern Russia. These separatists were very hostile to Russia. Gamsakhurdia floated the Idea of "Iberian-Caucasian solidarity",³³ (Iberia was an ancient name of Georgia). This was based on the hypothesis of a tribal and linguistic kinship between the Georgian and a number of peoples from Northern Caucasus as Chechens, Circassians and others. Russia, alarmed by these developments, lent its moral support to the opposition of Gamsakhurdia³⁴. The entire Northern caucasus region flourished as a centre of illegal arms trade, enabling the Southern Russian rebels to get hold

31. International Herald Tribune, (Paris) 18 Sept., 1991.

32. Times (London), 7 Jan., 1992.

33. Bruno, Alexei and Dmitri Trenin, "Commonwealth and Independence in post-Soviet Eurasia", (Great Britain, Frenkeass, 1998), pp.25-26.

34. Ghia Nodia, "Georgia's Identity crisis", Journal of Democracy, Vol.6, No.1, January 95, p.111.

of these arms. This region turned out to be a grave danger to Russia's security because of this illegal arms trade. This proved to be true when the Russians faced so much difficulty, later, while fighting the Chechen rebels.

Gamsakhurdia's economic policies also invited harsh criticism from the people. In his election campaign he promised to lead Georgia into a future of economic reforms, free market and prosperity, based on private enterprises. But after becoming President he tried to preserve the centrally controlled economy. After the sudden demise of USSR, quick economic reforms were needed to that time. But without this, high inflation, very low domestic production, no external trade, and closure of many state-owned industries, led to heavy poverty in Georgia. This further increased people's agony.

So, when the Military council took over after Gamsakhurdia departure, Tengiz Sigua, the Chairman of the Council, announced plans for significant economic reforms to alleviate the countries grave economic conditions³⁵.

After independence Gamsakhurdia planned to attach Georgia with the Western World, by not joining the CIS. Georgia appealed for this to the West on the basis of same culture,

35. The current digest of post-Soviet Press, Vol. 45, No.1, 1992, pp.14-16.

i.e. Christianity and same climate, i.e. Mediterranean climate³⁶. It was also said that the people of Georgia more western in outlook and attitude than any other part of the Soviet Union³⁷. But all of these did not attract the West. His ethnic policies and authoritative rule attracted especially harsh criticism from the West. Many countries of the western world could not understand how a former human right activist could have done it. Gamsakhurdia felt finally abandoned by the West.

After disintegration Yeltsin assumed the role of a leader of democracy. So, on the behalf of this and finding no support for Gamsakhurdia from abroad, it was easy for Russia to call the ouster of him as he became notorious as fascist and dictator.

Gamsakhurdia was a personality of complex nature. Despite making a constitutional provision separating the church and the state, he openly promoted the christianization of the Republic. In his most popular work, "Sakartvelos sulermisia" (Georgia's spiritual mission) he symbolised Georgian Christianity as militant ideology in defence of the nation³⁸. Comparing himself to 'De Gaulle', he urged for a strong

36. Temur Gamtsemidze's speech before the business council for the United Nations, New York. 11 September, 91, vital speeches, city News Publishing Company, Mount Pleasant.

37. Ibid.

38. Stephen F. Jones, No.25, p.130.

presidency. He could not understand why opposition parties opposed him as he was a democratically elected President with 87 Percent of the vote. He heavily criticised the oppositions, as enemies, who crucially deceived him. He alleged that "a key conspirator against both Gamsakhurdia and Georgia was Shevandnadze, who with the help of Moscow masterminded the "Civil Junta" which finally overthrew his government in January 1992³⁹.

The rise of nationalist Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, thus, not only escalated ethnic conflict, but he himself became the target of civil war. Because of his anti-Russia policies the relations between Russia and Georgia became acrimonious.

39. FBIS-SOV., 91-191, p.78.

CHAPTER - III

ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND IT'S IMPACT ON RUSSO-GEORGIAN RELATIONS

The ethnic conflicts in Georgia are a classic example of pressing ethnic problems plaguing different parts of the world. Each of these conflicts has its own socio-economic, political, cultural and national origins. People of a common racial origin and of the same linguistic community constitute a majority among the local population, but the same community is considered as a minority at the national level. They have risen in protest against interference in their socio-cultural life. The respective governments have treated these protest as secessionist movements brewing under the garb of preserving their respective cultural identities. The states' response in such cases ranges from changing the demographic profile of the region and in worst cases even using coercion to silent dissent. The present scenario is the continuation of the ethnic conflicts that existed in the erstwhile USSR in the early 20th century. The soviet regime suppressed the earlier ethnic problems by force without finding real solution to them.

The examples of an ethnic local majority being reduced to a minority are numerous. Infact, Stalin restored to this policy in a major way to diffuse such crisis. He even created arbitrary frontiers, which aimed at creating local

tensions in order to facilitate the manipulation of ethnic differences by the central authorities. While temporary success could not be denied, the feeling of oneness amongst these ethnic groups continued and they waited for the right opportunity to assert their independence. Economic stability and strong central authority could ensure that these movements did not acquire uncontrollable proportions. But a weak central power could fuel these movements. These conflicts not only seriously destabilized the situation in the region, but also increased socio-political tension across the country.

Georgia is a complex multi-ethnic state. The table given below shows the minority and ethnic compositions in Georgia¹ :—

Ethnic group	Population in 1979	Population in 1989
Armenians	448,000	436,615
Azerbaijanis	255,678	307,424
Ossetes	160,497	164,009
Abkhaz	85,285	93,275
Russians	371,608	338,645
Jews	20,107	10,302
Assyrians	5286	6205

The total minority population in Georgia comprises about 30%.

1. Paul B. Henze, "The demography of the caucasus according to 1989 Soviet census data", Central Asian Survey. Vol.10, No.112, 1991, pp.148-154.

Ethnic Conflicts in South Ossetia:—

South Ossetia is an autonomous oblast in Georgia. It covers an area of 1505 sq. km., with a population of 98,527², comprising Ossets, Georgians and Slavs. However, the number of Ossetes is 65,195, that is 66.2% of the total population³. Ossets are largely Christian and one of the most Russified ethnic groups in Caucasus, whose original inhabitants are an East Iranian people. During the Stalin rule they are divided into two parts – North and South Ossetia. North Ossetia went under Russian Jurisdiction, while South Ossetia became an autonomous region in Georgia. This is an example of Stalin's policy to diffuse the nationalist sentiments among the ethnic minorities.

Relations between the Georgians and the South Ossetians had an element of hostility from the very beginning. Culturally, Ossetians became a subject of suppression from time to time. The Georgianization programme of Georgia was a good example of the suppression of ethnic minorities. Ossetian's language forced to have "Georgianized" alphabets. By 1930 all native language schools in South Ossetia were closed.

In 1922, the Ossetians gained autonomous region status. But during Lavrenti Berias rule, they experienced many

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

difficulties. He forced the Ossetians to assimilate with the majority Georgian population⁴. Their cultural institutions were closed and their feelings were wounded when their religious institutes were forced to be closed. Minorities' quotas were removed from the Georgian parliament⁵. The Ossetians accused Tbilisi of deliberately neglecting them and of forcing them as socially and linguistically disadvantaged minorities to accept inferior jobs⁶.

South Ossetian faced another blow when in 1970, Georgian Communist Party boss Edward Shevardnadze launched a anti-corruption campaign. During this campaign Ossetian's own ethnic networks of mutual support and self protection came under government scrutiny. Many Ossetian's private development societies and charity programmes were forced to be closed. Shevardnadze himself admitted in his autobiography that in the 1970s and 1980s ethnic anxieties were on high rise in all the regions in Georgia⁷.

Perestroika and Glasnost intensified ethnic anxieties in South Ossetia. Many political groups emerged in South Ossetia. Afraid of the rising national sentiments in Georgia,

4. Darrell Slider, "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy", Central Asian Survey, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1985, pp.51-68.

5. Ian Bremmer, Ray Taras, "New States, New Politics : Building the Post Soviet Nations", (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.508.

6. Radio Liberty, Report on the USSR. 477/88, pp.1-5.

7. Radio Liberty Research, 157/80, P.2.

South Ossetian demanded greater political and economic representation and cultural and educational equality. These demands challenged the Georgians' belief that they, being a sole native of this country, were entitled to a privileged status stimulated by a history of foreign invasion and Russian atrocities. Georgians' deep national insecurity encouraged them to support the nationalist policies designed to protect majority, rather than the minority rights.

In 1988 the Communist Party of Georgia, published a draft paper titled 'State Programme for the Georgian Language', which advocated Georgian language as the medium for instruction in all Republican schools. The Georgian language test was made compulsory⁸ for entry into higher education. This was a challenge to the South Ossetians who spoke Georgian badly. Other measures included programmes for the promotion of Georgian history and the defence to historical monuments. Further, many laws were made to restrict immigration and all unofficial Georgian national holidays were institutionalised.

The creation of the Republican military units, comprising of only Georgians and the resettlement of the Georgians in the areas dominated by the minorities, must have seemed threatening to the Ossetians⁹.

8. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, No.5, P.51

9. Ibid.

The situation turned explosive when the nationalist Gamsakhurdia came to power in Georgia¹⁰. His policies towards minorities were heartbreaking. He opposed the eligibility for the South Ossetians to vote for the new Supreme Soviet as they were the “settlers”, not “indigenous”. Further, he said that the Ossetians had no right to residence in the Republic and so they would not be provided the equal status with the dominant ethnic group¹¹.

Alarmed by these developments, the South Ossetians feared that an independent Georgia would discriminate against them. President Gamsakhurdia called on the South Ossetians to return to their real homeland in the neighbouring North Ossetia. Conflicts broke out when the South Ossetians demanded for greater autonomy and reunification with North Ossetia within the Russian Federation. Gamsakhurdia saw this act as a direct threat to Georgia’s integrity and he annulled the autonomous status of South Ossetia. Despite of this, the South Ossetians proclaimed themselves a separate Republic in September 1990¹², which was supported by the North Ossetians.

Due to all these developments, large-scale conflicts broke

10. Ronald Grigor Suny. The Making of the Georgian Nation. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994). Ch.-14.

11. Ian Bremmer, Ray Taras, No.5, P.52.

12. Geoffrey Ponton, The Soviet era Soviet Politics from Lenin to Yeltsin. (Oxford : Blackwell, 1994), P.251.

out in 1990 between the Georgians and the Ossetians. The South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali was practically empty of Georgians by this stage and most of the Georgian Villages were burnt and abandoned¹³. The Georgian legislature declared a state of emergency in Tskhinvali, and other towns in South Ossetia¹⁴.

The situation became worsened day by day. The Georgian President Gamsakhurdia gave a call on 23 November, 1991 to, "all Georgians who can carry a gun" to march on toward Tskhinvali to put an end to the South Ossetia's aspirations to be independent¹⁵. He sent troops to suppress the Ossetians¹⁶. Alerted by these activities, the South Ossetian parliament meet on 28 November and elected Zneur Gassyev as both Prime Minister and President¹⁷. Gassyev proclaimed a state of emergency and announced a general mobilization.

But the mission of Gamsakhurdia remained unfinished as he was overthrown by the Georgians themselves. The new President of Georgia, Edward Shevardnadze quickly showed signs of a friendly approach to this problem. This led to a

13. The Guardian (London), 4 September, 1991.

14. Julian Birch, "Ossetia : a Caucasian Bosnia in microcosm", Central Asian Survey, 1995, 14(1), pp.43-77.

15. International Herald Tribune (London) 23-24 November, 1991.

16. Interfax (Moscow) 28 November, 1991.

17. Ibid.

cease-fire agreement that was signed between the Georgians and the Ossetians in June 1992.

South Ossetian Conflict and Russo-Georgian relations:—

Although a peace agreement was signed between the Ossetians and the Georgians, it was never carried out. There were severe differences between the two parties. Certain elements in both Ossetia and Georgia were not in tune with the peace agreement and were advocating a tough stand against each other. There were in fact considerable reservations among some of the Georgian leaders over the agreement. The Georgian Defence Minister even boasted that he would end the conflict within a week¹⁸. Similarly, there were divisions within the South Ossetian leadership. On the one extreme, there was the Chairman of the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet, Torez Kolumbegov (himself married to a Georgian) who favoured the reunification of North and South Ossetia and at the same time sought talks with Shevardnadze. On the other extreme Oleg Teziyev, the Vice Chairman of Supreme Soviet was more inclined towards the idea of a military solution, and was actively involved in arming the Ossetian guards and the irregular militias¹⁹.

18. Izvestiya, 12 June, 1992, (Trans. in Current Digest of Post Soviet Press, Vol. 44, No.24, 1992, P.15).

19. *Ibid.*

In the face of such antagonism, the Georgian-Ossetian negotiations had thus produced a false start on the path to a settlement. The conflict was eventually brought under control as a result of the initiatives taken by Georgia and Russia, more specifically by Shevardnadze and Boris Yeltsin²⁰.

Shevardnadze had already signalled a new willingness from the Georgian side to resolve this issue through his talks with the Ossetians. Yeltsin also appealed to both the Georgians and the Ossetians for an end to the 'senseless bloodshed'²¹. In a call to Shevardnadze, Yeltsin signalled his approval of Shevardnadze's, peace keeping moves and he wished to take part in settling the conflict²².

But the Russian direct involvement on the side of the Ossetians caused a tension between Russia and Georgia. Georgia accused Russia of supporting the Ossetians and of indulging in direct attack on Georgia. War of words and actions actually did heighten the tension to new crisis levels, taking it in the direction of war between the two states.

The statement of Russian Khasbulatov, Chairman of Russian Supreme Soviet added fuel to this fire. In his statement on June 1992, he said "the ousting of the South

20. Julian Birch, No.14, P.45.

21. Interfax (Moscow) 9 June, 1992.

22. Ibid.

Ossetian population from their historical homeland by the Georgian is genocide²³.” He added that if Georgia continued to violate the autonomy of the South Ossetia by expelling them from their homeland, Russia’s Supreme Soviet would have to reconsider the South Ossetia’s official request for formal annexation to the Russian Federation²⁴. In his view, the conflict could not be considered as a Georgian internal affair, it directly affects Russia’s state interests. Further, he went on, “Russia is prepared to take urgent measures to defend its citizens from criminal attempts on their lives and to render harmless those groups of bandits, who are shooting to kill the peaceful population and Russian troops²⁵.”

A front to front war like situation occurred when on 18 June, 1992, the Russian helicopters attacked the tank unit of the Georgian National Guard and the Georgian villages²⁶. It was a direct involvement in the Georgian internal affairs from the Russian side. Russia even despatched her troops to South Ossetia in the name of saving the Russian minorities there.

Further measures were also taken by Russia against Georgia. It was subjected to an economic blockade. Russia

23. The current digest of the Post Soviet Press, Vol.44, No.24, 1992, P.16, and in Izvestia 15 June, 1992.

24. Ibid. pp.16-17.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

closed the gas pipeline which provided essential fuel for domestic and military uses²⁷. Highways used by the Georgian troops were also jammed by Russia²⁸.

Russia's Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi also came into war of words. On 20 June, he appealed to Shevardnadze to book those, who practised genocide. The following day he threatened, "If one more shell falls on the territory of South Ossetia or the Russian military unit, the side, that launches it, will get ten times as much in return"²⁹.

An environment of anxieties prevailed in Georgia following these developments. From the Georgian side, Khasbulatvo's statement and a sudden helicopter attack were viewed as tantamount to a declaration of war. Even the moderate Shevardnadze condemned Khasbulatov's views as populist and demagogic as well as an interference in Georgia's internal affairs³⁰. Russia, according to Shevardnadze, was embarking upon another imperial adventure, seeking forcibly to incorporate South Ossetia³¹.

The situation became further complicated when the volunteer fighters from North Ossetia arrived in support of

27. Burch, No.14, P.46.

28. Ibid.

29. Daily Telegraph (London) 22 June, 1992.

30. Daily Telegraph (London) 16 June, 1992

31. Ibid.

their South Ossetian neighbours. Georgia accused Russia of sending their own troops in the disguise of the North Ossetian fighters. The South Ossetians also received armed support from North Ossetia through a mountain highway tunnel that was built between North and South Ossetia by Russia in 1980³². In the Georgian eyes this was a handwork of Russia³³.

After having armed support from outside, allegedly from Russia, the South Ossetian started new attacks on the Georgian side. The Georgian National Guard now launched heavy bombardments on the Ossetians. Heavy casualties were inflicted on both sides³⁴.

There were many skirmishes on the Russo-Georgian border as well. The North Ossetian Supreme Soviet Chairman Golazov appealed to Yeltsin to send troops to help South Ossetia win its independence from Georgia³⁵. He also said that the North Ossetia herself was ready to mobilise all adult males to defend those in the South, if required to do so³⁶. Following this call, Russia sent its special troops to the North and promised 12 billion roubles as an aid for

32. David, E. Mark, "Eurasia Letter : Russia and the New Transcaucasus. Foreign Policy, No.105, winter 96-97, pp.141-159.

33. Ibid.

34. The Independent, (London), 21 June, 1992.

35. Daily Telegraph, (London) 23 June, 1992.

36. Ibid.

weapons³⁷.

Now Shevardnadze took hard stand due to Russia's interventions. He warned that any intervention would lead to a large-scale conflict between Russia and Georgia³⁸. He also sent a letter to the Russian Supreme Soviet condemning 'ill considered, frivolous and irresponsible actions' on the Russian side³⁹. Shevardnadze also tried to expose Russian policy by internationalising this issue on the ground of human right violations. He appealed to the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to take all necessary step to prevent the Russian aggression against Georgia and save the lives of the innocent Georgian people⁴⁰.

However, in this highly charged atmosphere a ray of hope emerged, when Yeltsin contacted Shevardnadze on 22 June 1992. Both sides agreed to meet and discuss about Ossetia in Dagomys, Russia. They reached an agreement on a cease-fire. A number of decisions were taken – withdrawal of Georgian National Guards from around Tskhinvali; the setting of a special commission; and the deployment of a peace

37. Julian Birch, No.14, P.47.

38. The Independent, (London) 23 June, 1992.

39. The Times (London) 23 June, 1992.

40. The Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, Vol.44, No.24, 1992, P.17.

keeping force of the Russian, Georgian and Ossetian troops⁴¹. The most important thing was that this was the first such force since the break-up of USSR⁴².

The South Ossetian refugees were also a hurdle between Russia and Georgia. Many Ossetian refugees took shelter in Southern Russia during the conflict. Further, they became an economic burden for Russia. Russia insisted on repatriation of refugees to Georgia. This issue was solved when Georgia agreed to repatriate and rehabilitate all refugees. There was also some dispute between Russia and Georgia over the size of the peacekeeping force and the share of each countries in it⁴³. This issue was, however, solved when CSCE agreed to monitor the peace keeping programme for the time being.

Thus, the South Ossetian problem emerged with all its socio-cultural peculiarities, only to be aggravated to a considerable extent. But, the problem could not be resolved completely. After the loss of at least thousand lives and the creation of a huge refugee problem, though, peace has been achieved, but not a state of harmony. Separatism and anti-Georgian sentiments remained high among the South Ossetians. The Russo-Georgian difference over Abkhazia

41. Julian Birch No.14, P.48.

42. International Herald Tribune, (Paris) 25 June 1992.

43. S. Crow, The theory and practice of peacekeeping in the former USSR, RFE/RL Research Report, (Munich) Vol.1, No.37, 18 September, 1992, p.34.

continued to divide these two powers and, in the view of the Georgians, served to encourage the Ossetians in their long-term aspirations.

Ethnic conflict in Abkhazia:—

Abkhazia is an autonomous republic in the North-Western part of Georgia. It is adjacent to the Black Sea and Russia. It is a multi ethnic region comprising of the Abkhaz, the Georgians and the Slavs (largely Russian). Total population of Abkhazia is 524,161⁴⁴. It is worth noting that the number of Abkhaz is only 90,713, that is 17.6 percent of the total population⁴⁵.

The Abkhazian people are one of the earliest settlers of the Caucasus region and the first to be Christianized. The history of Abkhazia is inevitably tied to the history of the Caucasus. Abkhazia was an independent country at different times in its history. It was respectively occupied by Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and Turks. Each of these occupants left the impact of their culture on the Abkhazians. Under the Ottoman rule it was widely influenced by the Islamic religion and culture.

Abkhazia came completely under Russian control in 1864,

44. Stanislav Lokaba, "Abkhazia is Abkhazia" Central Asian Survey, Vol.14, No.1, 1995, pp.97-105.

45. Ibid.

when the whole of Transcaucasia was captured by Russia. The Abkhazians are a freedom loving people. They have their own distinct history, culture, language and identity.⁴⁶ They became a subject of suppression from time to time since the Soviet rule. They consistently raised their voice against all these odds. But, finally, they took up arms against the suppressive powers and ethnic conflicts broke out in 1990.

During the first eight decades of the 19th century, more than 1,00,000 Abkhazians deported to the Ottoman Empire, especially in 1864 and 1877-78 in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war. With the collapse of the Tsarist Empire. Abkhazia enjoyed a short period of independence as a party to the North Caucasus Confederation. After the Russian revolution, it came under the Menshevik Georgia. However, the Georgian Menshevik resorted to repressive policies against their minorities, particularly the Abkhaz. This became a ploy for the Bolsheviks to propagate against the Mensheviks and to destabilise the independent Georgia by manipulating the nationalist feelings of the Georgian minorities⁴⁷.

The Bolsheviks established their control on whole Soviet Union in 1921. The same year Abkhazia became a Soviet

46. On Abkhazia's ancient history and their identity see, B.G. Hewitt, "Abkhazia : A Problem of Identity and Ownership", Central Asian Survey, Vol.12, No.3, 1993, pp. 267-323.

47. Richard Pipes, "The Formation of the Soviet Union, Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923", (New York. Athenaeum, 1964), p.212.

Socialist Republic. This was hailed by the Abkhazians people as the liberation from the repressive policies of the Menshevik government in Georgia. Abkhazia joined USSR as a Union republic in December 1921. For some 10 years the country maintained an independent status within the Soviet System, and in practice, governed itself autonomously.

But, with the rise of Stalin things changed. He abolished the independent existence of Abkhazia in 1931 and placed it merely as an autonomous territory under the control of Georgia. As far as the Georgian and the most other governments around the world are concerned, Abkhazia is still considered as a territory under Georgia.

During Stalin's rule, Lavrenti Beria was appointed as the head of the Georgian Communist Party and the Chairman of the Transcaucasian Party Committee in 1932. From 1933 onwards, he instituted a suppressive anti-Abkhazian policy, which was supported by Stalin himself. These policies were maintained and strengthened till the deaths of both Beria and Stalin in 1953⁴⁸. During this period Abkhazia experienced a forced importation of various nationalities, especially the Mingrelians, Georgians and Russians. More than this, many Abkhazian were forcefully deported to the Central Asian republic under the Stalin's nationalist policy⁴⁹. This resulted

48. Darrell Slider, "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy : the case of Abkhazia", Central Asian Survey, Vol.4, No.4 , 1985, pp.51-68.

49. Ibid.

in a huge decline of Abkhazian population. The population of the Abkhazians between 1897 to 1970 grew from 58,697 to a mere 77,276! But the population of the Georgians in Abkhazia during this period grew from 25,875 to 1,99,595 and of the Russians from 5,135 to 92,889⁵⁰, thereby, the Abkhazians became a minority in their own homeland. What was the most painful for the Abkhazians was, that they were forcefully classified as Georgians in some of the Soviet censuses⁵¹.

During Stalin's rule, the Abkhazians had grievances against the Georgianisation of Abkhazia. In the 1930, 'Cyrillic' was introduced as a script for the all non-Russians. But the Abkhazians were forced to adopt the Georgian script. Teaching in and of the Abkhaz was abolished and all the Abkhaz-language school were turned into Georgian language school. Beria wanted a total transformation of the Abkhazians into the Georgians. So, many of the Abkhazian cultural institutions such as, libraries, historical monuments etc. were destroyed⁵². Many Abkhazian scholars, who worked for the development of the Abkhazian language, literature and history were persecuted⁵³. Further, radio broadcasting in the

50. B.G. Hewitt, No.46, P.272.

51. Ibid.

52. Ian Bremmer, Ray Taras, "New States, New Politics : Building the Post-Soviet Nations, (Cambridge University Press 1997), p.50.

53. "Documents from the KGB archive in Sukhume. Abkhazia in the Stalin Years. Published in Central Asian Survey, Vol.14, No.1, 1995, pp.155-189.

Abkhazian language was also prohibited.

Stalin also designed a policy to keep the Abkhazian population restricted to village. The indigenous Abkhazians were deprived of their right to take up residence in the town of Sukhumi within a distance of 20 kilometers, on the grounds, that they were untrustworthy elements⁵⁴. As a result of this discriminatory policy, the Abkhazians became economically and industrially the most backward and deprived section among the Soviet populace. Lack of industrialisation, huge unemployment and negligible level of urbanization made them primitive in their level of living.

The oppression of the Abkhazians during the Stalin era is too much to be forgotten today and is an important factor in understanding the Abkhazians determination to defend their self-government or state-hood.

During the Brezhnev period in 1978, the anxieties of the ethnic Abkhazians were on high. The Abkhazians raised their voices against cultural and socio-political discrimination when the new Breznev constitution was promulgated. Many letters citing their grivances were sent to Moscow. They even sought for secession from Georgia and for union with the Russian Federation. This was an extremely bold step at that

54. Ibid.

time. Public disturbances took place and troops were sent to quell it. A commission was despatched from Moscow and a variety of measures were taken. It included a package of concessions, ranging from economic investment in the region to increased publishing and broadcasting in the Abkhazian language. Tactically speaking, the Georgian leadership was forced to admit that many of the complaints made by the Abkhaz nationalists were legitimate⁵⁵. However, Moscow rejected the twin demands of secession from Georgia and of nullifying the withdrawal of the constitutional recognition of the Georgian language as a state language in Abkhazia. Thus no fundamental changes resulted and the discriminations against the Abkhazians continued as usual.

Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost brought new hope for the Abkhazians. Accumulation of nationalist sentiments led to the emergence of many ethnicity based political parties. The economic crisis and the weak central power brought secessionist elements to the fore, both in Abkhazia and Georgia. The policies of Nationalist Gamsakhurdia paved the way for the conflict which broke out in 1989. A state programme for the Georgian language became law in 1989. According to this law, teaching of the Georgian language in all school became obligatory and the Georgian language and

55. Stephen Cohen, Rabinowitch and Sharlet, The Soviet Union Since Stalin, (London Macmillan, 1980), pp.200-226.

literature tests became pre-requisite for entry into higher education. This raised the fears of renewed attempt of Georgianization of Abkhazia. Gamsakhurdia further questioned the Abkhazians rights of residence as he thought that they are outsiders⁵⁶. Due to Gamsakhurdia's policy Abkhazians feared that they would face even more discrimination in the independent Georgia. So in 1989, in the form of 'Lykhny Declaration', they demanded re-creation of the original Abkhazian SSR, they enjoyed before 1931⁵⁷. The consequences were dire. The Georgia saw this as a danger to their country. An intense anti-Abkhazian campaign was started by Georgia and ethnic conflict broke out in Sukhmi and Ochamchira.

Ethnic conflict and Russo-Georgian Relation

The inter ethnic clashes were intensified, when the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia voted for independence on 25 August 1990⁵⁸. This move was rejected by Gamsakhurdia. He also nullified the borders between Georgia and Abkhazia. In December 1990, the Abkhazia Supreme Soviet elected the historian Vladislav Ardzinba as its Chairman. Ardzinba was a famous minorities' rights champion during his tenure as a

56. Ian Bremmer Ray Jones, No.52, p.512.

57. Ford Ennals and others, report of a UNPO Mission in Abkhaza Georgia and the Northern Caucasus, Central Asian Survey, Vol.12, No. 3, 1993, pp.325-345.

58. John Colarusso, "Abkhazia", Central Asian Survey, Vol.14, No.1, 1995, pp.75-96

Deputy in the union parliament. Meanwhile, a major catalyst of tensions between Abkhazia and Georgia was the 17th March 1991 all union referendum on Gorbachev's new Union Treaty. Georgia's Supreme Soviet prohibited its population in Georgia from taking part in it. But Abkhazia's electorate did take part and voted overwhelmingly to enter the new proposed union of sovereign republics as an autonomous republic. The Georgian government immediately annulled the results of the referendum for being in violation of their own earlier decision. Gamsakhurdia government intensified its pressure against the Abkhazians. In a public meeting in August 1991 then Georgian Minister of Education. Temir Koridze warned that if Abkhazia signed the treaty, "rivers of blood would flow⁵⁹".

However, the new Union Treaty became irrelevant in the wake of the Soviet Coup. Another consequence of the failed coup was that the serious internal dissensions appeared within the Gamsakhurdia regime. A fight erupted between Gamsakhurdia and his opposition. Fierce fighting also broke out in Abkhazia as the Abkhazians took this opportunity to come out of the clutches of the suppressive Gamsakhurdia. Finally, Gamsakhurdia regime collapsed and Shevardnadze came to power in 1992. He got the universal recognition of Georgia. This development was disastrous for Abkhazia

59. Hewitt, No.46, p.288.

because Georgia established its borders in international law thereby, legitimizing Abkhazia's position as a part of Georgia.

For Russia, the Abkhazian conflict came as another opportunity to keep pressure on Georgia. It had already criticised Georgia in 1989 for its anti-Abkhazian policies⁶⁰. The arrival of Shevardnadze did not calm down the tension. The immediate cause of the armed conflict in Abkhazia in 1992 was the abduction of the interior minister of Georgia. He was allegedly kidnapped by the Gamsakhurdia supporters. Shevardnadze dispatched troops to Abkhazia. The official version for sending the troops was to release the minister and to put an end to ongoing sabotage and looting, particularly on the railway line. But, later on, the defence minister of Georgia, Kitovini, admitted that the goal of the military operation was to put a stop to the secessionist moves of the Abkhazian Parliament⁶¹.

Kitovini, a Rambo-type figure who enjoyed considerable popularity among the Georgian population marched into the Abkhaz capital Sukhmi, and opened fire on the parliament building, thus precipitating a virtual war⁶². The Abkhazian parliament protested the incursion of Georgian troops calling it an invasion and occupation. But Shevardnadze maintained

60. Hewitt, No.46, p.283.

61. Jhon Colarusso, No.58, p.80.

62. Elizabeth Fuller "Mediators for Transcaucaria's conflicts" The world today, Vol.45, No.5, May 93, pp89-92.

that it was Georgia's sovereign right to relocate its troops within its territory. By this time, volunteers from the North Caucasus started arriving in Abkhazia to help the Abkhazian units. Their support came as a result of the formation, in 1989, of the Confederation of North Caucasus Peoples, largely at the initiative of the Abkhazians. However, with the eruption of fighting, the Abkhazians militia retreated and, within days, the Georgian troops were in control of Sukhumi.

The Georgian-Abkhazian conflict reached a new phase with the arrival of the Russian forces in Sukhumi. These forces, according to Russia, were to safeguard the military instalments and to protect the Russian minorities. But it was proved later that they took active part in conflict on behalf of Russia. Meanwhile, amidst of high scale tension, a cease-fire accord was signed by the Georgians and the Abkhazians under the auspices of Yeltsin. But it never was observed.

Further, the tension between Russia and Georgia increased. when some Russian holiday makers were killed in Sukhumi by the Georgian troops⁶³. The Russian Supreme Soviet passed a resolution in which Russia accused Shevardnadze of using "violence to solve complex problems of inter ethnic relations⁶⁴." A second resolution suspended the transfer of

63. Times (London), 20 August 1992.

64. *Ibid.*

Russian arms and equipment to Georgia, including those already promised. In Georgian eyes it was a Russian interference in its internal political affairs.

As the fighting went on, the Abkhazian leadership left Sukhumi for the coastal city of Gudauta. The Russian out-migration from Abkhazia created a row between Russia and Georgia. Furthermore Georgia was taken aback when the Abkhaz forces launched a sudden attack. With heavy armoured equipments, including T-72 tank, the Abkhaz forces overran Gagra, on the Black Sea Coast. Shevardnadze blamed Russia for supplying arms to Abkhazians⁶⁵. At this point there was some truth in Shevardnadze's claim, because the Abkhazians didn't have these type of weapons earlier. He also blamed Russia for supplying military hardware under the cover of humanitarian aid. However, Yeltsin warned that Russia would take "appropriate measures", if Russian lives were threatened⁶⁶.

Further, the Russo-Georgian relations deteriorated as the Georgian State council announced that Georgia will assume control of the Russian weapons and military equipments in its territory. The Russian Defence Minister warned that any attempts to seize the Russian military hardware would lead

65. The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press. Vol.44, No.41, 1992, P.12

66. Ibid.

to direct armed clashes with Russia⁶⁷. Russia dispatched more troops for protection of its establishments in Georgia.

One thing is important to note that there are certain elements in both the countries who were always in offensive mood against each others. As on August 1992, Shevardnadze announced the withdrawal of the troops from Shukhumi⁶⁸. But this never happened. Georgian Defence Minister Kitovini further advanced and acquired more territory in Abkhazia. In Russia also, despite the peace efforts by Yeltsin, the integrative forces, such as Zhyrinovasky and others, always demanded stern actions against Georgia as Georgia did not comply with the Russian interests.

All these developments in 1993 led to the deterioration of the Russo-Georgian relations. After being elected unopposed as the head of Georgian Parliament, Shevardnadze took tough stand in dealing with Russia. He demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces stationed in Georgia. This further strained the relations between their military forces. In these clashes, a Russian helicopter was shot down by the Georgian forces causing the loss of 62 lives.

More importantly, Sukhumi was repeatedly bombed by

67. Zbigniew Bizizinski, Russia and the CIS: Documents, Date and Analysis, (New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1997), p.581.

68. Ford Ennals and others, No.55, p.334.

some unidentified aircrafts. The Georgian authorities including Shevardnadze himself blamed Russia for bombing of Sukhmi. He said that, "there was no other place than Russia, where the planes could be coming from"⁶⁹. Moscow denied its involvement in attacking Sukhumi, but the contradictory allegations of Pavel Grachev confirmed a Russian complicity, if not direct involvement in the attack. He initially accused the Georgians of bombing their own citizens. Later on, he admitted "that a Russian attack had taken place in revenge for Georgian shelling of area close to the Russian position including its military bases in Georgia"⁷⁰. Further, snob Grachev suggested, that Shevardnadze should meet him, if he wanted to talk about the bombing. It was very ridiculous because according to the protocol, Grachev as a dignitary of a foreign state, should pay his respects to Shevardnadze.

The contentions between Russo-Georgia relations further increased, when in March 1993, the Abkhazians surprisingly attacked Sukhumi and forced the Georgians out of the city⁷¹. Shevardnadze accused Russia of supporting the Abkhazians for this attack, who were also assisted by the volunteers from the North Caucasus. He asserted that "Georgia suffered defeat only because the strategic interests of a big state should be

69. Summary of the World Broadcast, 18 March, 1993, SU/1640, B/8.

70. Thomas Goltz, "Hidden Russian Hand", Foreign Policy, No.92, fall 1993, pp.92-117.

71. The Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, Vol.45, No.39, 1993, p.17.

protected in Georgia”⁷². Shevardnadze’s accusation was proved as a Russian fighter plane SU-27 was shot down while flying over Sukhumi. Moscow’s claim that it was in patrolling mission could not satisfy Georgia. Georgia even showed several Russian captives to some Western representatives and tried to prove that the Russian Army fought along with the Abkhazians.

It is difficult to believe that the Abkhaz military forces drawn from a population of just 90,000 could have defeated the Georgian National Guard backed by 4 millions Georgians. More over, the sophisticated arms and heavy artillery used by the Abkhazians against the Georgians, which neither the Abkhazians nor the North Caucasian volunteers possessed, suggested that Russia could have supplied them to the Abkhaz fighters⁷³.

In October 1993, the deterioration in the Russo-Georgia relations became even more alarming. Following the defeat in Sukhumi, a general mobilization alert was declared in Georgia. Shevardnadze even vowed to die in Sukhumi rather than to surrender before the Abkhazian rebels. But, Georgia lost the battle and Shevardnadze forced to flee with his wounded soldiers. But he promised a warfare for decades to come⁷⁴.

72. Ibid.

73. Summary of the World Broadcast, 18 March, 1993, SU/1640, B/9.

74. Time (London), 11 October, 1993.

The fear of the escalation of war made Yeltsin and Shevardnadze to talk of peace negotiations. Both were also burdened with economic implications of this war. A UN sponsored talks began in Geneva. It led to the signing of a peace accord between the Georgians and the Abkhazians in May 1994⁷⁵. It should be noted that in the same year, Georgia joined the CIS. Russia also agreed to send its troops for ceasefire monitoring in Abkhazia. This ceasefire had been largely observed, although some small fights were going on.

The Abkhazians saw this struggle as one for the survival of their culture and language, and for the presentation of their separate identity. The Georgians, desperately did not want to lose if nothing else, a piece of land. On the other hand, Russia acted as a power balancing force and made Georgia to comply with Russia's interests.

Multi-ethnic Georgia has been plagued by ethnic conflicts since long. The problem intensified due to Soviet Nationalist policy and the rise of nationalism in Georgia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the South Ossetians and the Abkhazians demanded independence and even waged an armed rebellion for it. Surprisingly, this ethnic conflict was perceived by Russia as an opportunity. It not only supported

75. Colarusso, No.56, pp.49-93.

the rebellions of the Ossetia and the Abkhazia but even engaged its army at times against Georgia. All this was being done by Russia to safeguard its own interests. Gamsakhurdia initially ignored Russian interests and pursued an anti-Russian policy. Even during the early days of Shevardnadze, Georgia tried to establish an identity independent of Russia, while Russia wanted Georgia to remain under its sphere of influence by forcing her to join the CIS. The ethnic conflict in Georgia was utilised by Russia towards fulfilling its own objectives. Therefore, this phase saw strained relationship between Georgia and Russia. However, in 1993, with Georgia formally joining the CIS the relations saw a marked improvement.

Infact, the Abkhaz and South Ossetia problem remained unresolved, and the peace that prevails now is dependent only on the presence of Russian peacekeepers there. Therefore, there is always the possibility of the renewal of conflict, if Georgia turns assertive against Russian interests in its own territory.

CHAPTER - IV

RUSSO-GEORGIAN RELATIONS UNDER SHEVARDNADZE'S RULE

There was a total chaos in Georgia after the departure of Gamsakhurdia. When all the earlier events unfolded, Georgia found itself plunged into a modern version of 'Hobbes's state of nature'. The state institutions were ineffective and the ethnic conflicts led to an anarchic situation in Georgia. Georgia almost lost all influence over the economy. The people lost faith in the state. The people were struggling hard to meet all their economic needs. The despotic rule of Gamsakhurdia virtually isolated Georgia in the international arena. Georgia was plunged into a civil war. Heavy destructions were all around in Georgia. At this crucial juncture Shevardnadze came to Georgia.

Shevardnadze was the chairman of the Georgian Communist Party during 1972 to 1985. He was the foreign minister during Gorbachev's period till the break-up of the Soviet Union. During his tenure as the foreign minister he made a good rapport with Russian leaders, especially with Yeltsin. He had stood by Yeltsin at the time of August coup in 1991. At the personal level both have a good friendly relationship. Shevardnadze also earned international acclaim as a moderate leader. He transformed the East-West relations. He also helped in bringing down the Berlin Wall and uniting

the people. The outside world embodied him as a liberal and he was one of the key figures who ended the cold war. He also became famous for being negotiator of compromises.

But after the break-up of USSR he was still in Moscow. He did not return to independent Georgia. He was a controversial figure in his home republic during his tenure as the party boss. Nationalist Gamsakhurdia labelled him as an agent of Moscow and an anti-Georgian. Due to Gamsakhurdia's propaganda many Georgians felt that he was not suitable for independent Georgia. Gamsakhurdia blamed him for organising the civil war in Georgia.

After the departure of Gamsakhurdia Shevardnadze became the need of the hour. After all, he was the only person who could have worked with all the factions. He had already showed his intention to work for democracy. He did not even hide that he wanted to work with the opponents of Gamsakhurdia¹. Even the hard liner communists welcomed him. A crowd of 5000 people gathered at Tbilisi airport to welcome their leader shows the Georgians' faith in him². With the appointment of Shevardnadze as the head of the provisional government in Tbilisi, it was thought that he

1. Newstime (Hyderabad), 20 January, 1992.

2. Times (London), 9 March, 1993.

would be accommodative towards Russians. This perception did not come true in earlier phases, though he tried to amend the tense relations between Georgia and Russia.

As mentioned before, the Russian policy towards Georgia during this period was marked by the emerging reintegrative tendencies in Russia's policy towards near abroad countries. In fact, Russia realised the importance of the newly independent states in terms of economy, strategic location and security. Therefore, there was a shift in Russian policy from neglecting the near abroad countries to an active engagement with them in order to persuade or force them to accommodate Russia's interests. In other words, the gap between nationalist-conservative forces' approach towards the near abroad and that of Westerners represented by Yeltsin and Kozyrev got narrowed, if not disappeared³. Thus, Kremlin began to pursue its strategic interests in the near abroad, regardless of niceties of independence. The structural weakness of the new republics compounded with the presence of the Russian minorities and ethnic conflict in some of the republics provided a good ground for Moscow to follow its strategic goals there. Georgia is a good example of how Russia succeeded in altering its behaviour through policy of stick and carrot.

3. Leszek Buszynski, "Russian Foreign Policy after the Cold War". (West Point, Praeger Publisher, 1996), pp. 4-14.

Amidst the ethnic conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia with alleged Russian support, Shevardnadze had the uphill task in Georgia. During the whole 1992 and 1993 the Russo-Georgian relations were much dependent on the ethnic conflicts. Shevardnadze himself accused Russia for supporting the separatists of Georgia. It is worth noting, that in the case of South Ossetia, Moscow was not so directly involved as it did in Abkhazia. Though there were some evidences that Russia's military forces and its peacekeeping mission sided with the Ossetians in order to put pressure on Georgia⁴. But it is more likely that the conservative forces and nationalists in Moscow and within the military were behind the events, acting independently from the government in Moscow. It may be suggested that Moscow did not utilise the conflict to extract concessions from Tbilisi as it did with regard to the Abkhazian conflict. Therefore, this behaviour can be identified with the first phase of Russian policy towards the near abroad that was mostly based on the Westerners school of thought, supporting a moderate policy towards the newly independent states.

However, the events in Abkhazia went in different directions. This indicated Russia's assertion to follow its own national interest in the near abroad. The old policy of

4. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report, 12 November 1992.

divide and rule was used by Russia in a systematic manner to bring states which had refused to join the CIS like Georgia, back to its fold.

Although Shevardnadze succeeded in bringing a cease-fire in South Ossetia with an agreement with Moscow, Abkhazian problem caused bitter relations between Russia and Georgia. The increasing Russian threat pushed Shevardnadze to woo western support through his western oriented policy. But all his hue and cry proved in vain. There was some humanitarian assistance that Georgia received from the West, especially the USA. It was absolutely indispensable in enabling Georgia to live through tough times of anarchy and war. Despite these aids, western countries failed to support Georgia. In the post-communist period Russian democracy was the absolute priority for the West. So, after the fall of Sukhumi in the hands of Abkhaz fighters, Shevardnadze's appeal to the U.S., Italy, Spain, Great Britain and other countries proved futile⁵. All the countries turned their blind eyes towards Russia. Then Georgia turned to the former Soviet Union countries. A friendship treaty was signed between Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan in 1993⁶. Russia considered it as a threat. It is worth noting that Ukraine and Azerbaijan both pursued anti-Russian policy at that time.

5. The current digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol. 45, No.39,1993, P.19.

6. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 22 March 93, SU/1643, B/4.

But they also did not help Georgia against Russia. As such, it did not promote Georgia's position before Russia.

However, a turning point emerged in favour of Russia in the later half of 1993. As Abkhazia fell to the separatists, Gamsakhurdia returned from exile in a bid to overthrow Shevardnadze whom he saw as the illegitimate head. His forces, the Zviadists, rallied behind him with some Abkhaz fighters. They quickly seized nine towns, including the Black Sea port of Poti, a major supply point for the whole country. By mid-October, the Zviadists had captured up to a third of the country.

With the prospect of the total collapse of his country, Shevardnadze on 18 October 1993, made an appeal to Moscow to come to his rescue⁷. Having played a part in destabilising Georgia. Moscow now came to the support of the government against the violent anti-Russian Zviadists. In November 1993 Russian forces arrived in Tbilisi and the Zviadists were quickly defeated. Gamsakhurdia committed suicide⁸.

The support of Russia had its price. In the absence of any option outside the CIS, it appeared that there was only one option before Tbilisi, namely to turn towards Russia.

7. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 28 October, 1993, SU/1852, F/1.

8. Interfax (Moscow) 2 January, 1994.

Hence, Georgian government agreed to join the CIS which it had earlier resisted. As Shevardnadze put it: "I sent a telegram there consenting to Georgia's joining the CIS, something that I had opposed until the very end. I agreed to the Russian Defence Minister's proposal to send additional armed forces into Abkhazia. Georgia was essentially brought to its knees⁹."

Moreover, it should be noted that Russia used not only military pressure, but also utilized the economic levers at its disposal against Georgia.

It should be emphasized here that the structure of the Soviet economy was interconnected through central planning and regional specialization among the union republics¹⁰. Therefore, the new independent states are heavily depended on each other particularly on Russian Federation. Russia is the source of raw material and energy as well as a market for the low quality products of the near abroad countries. This economic power provides Moscow a good lever to put pressure on the near abroad countries who are unwilling to join the CIS, like Georgia.

The ethnic conflict and civil war in Georgia virtually

9. The current digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol. 45, No.39, 1993, p.19.

10. B. Miller, "Inter republic economic transition, Armonk, Vol.35, No.3, July 1992, pp.78-87.

brought its economy in bad shape. Further, rail and road blockades by Russia brought about catastrophe to the Georgian economy. Not only this, Russia blocked the export-import of Georgia to the other countries and deliveries of goods from Russia was terminated¹¹. The situation was exacerbated as a consequence of Russian retaliatory measures against Georgia for not joining the CIS.

Hence, the Georgian economy was in shambles before 1994. Total material product of the country declined by 80 percent¹². Many of the Georgian enterprises were shut down. Due to uncontrollably printed money, inflation had reached 9,000 percent¹³. The ethnic conflicts and civil war destroyed much of the infrastructure. Prices drastically went up. Visible corruption and criminal gangs on the streets led to a fragmented, cynical and passive population¹⁴.

So, the disappointment of Shevardnadze with the West, compounded with increasing economic hardship and Russia's heavy handed deal with Georgia, forced Tbilisi to yield to the Moscow's demand. Henceforth, Georgia not only acceded

11. B. Plyshevski, Reforming the economies of the CIS: The Transcaucasian republics and Moldova, "Problem of economic transition", Vol.37, No.10, February, 1995, p.59.

12. Stephen F. Jones, "Georgia's Return from Chaos, Current History, Vol.95, No.503, Oct. 1996, p.340.

13. Plyshevski, No.11, p.58.

14. Stephen F. Jones, No.12, p.342.

to the CIS, but also entered in to the CIS collective security system. Georgia even accepted the Moscow demand that Russian forces can guard any part of Georgia including its sea water¹⁵.

The net effect of these 1993 events was to reinvigorate Russia's dominant influence in Georgia. Moscow fulfilled its one issue by joining of Georgia into the CIS. Now Georgia and Russia came together. It must be remembered that the decision to join the CIS was the decision of Shevardnadze alone. Even the Georgian Parliament was not consulted at that time. Many leaders of Georgia heavily criticized Shevardnadze. Georgian Parliamentary deputy Irina Sarishvzli equated joining the CIS with joining Russia.¹⁶

In fact Shevardnadze played a gamble by joining the CIS. If his position had not improved he would have been in danger of being labelled pro-Russian. But after the Russian support he proved himself stronger. Moreover, he had no other option. In his own words, "I saw in this decision the last chance to rescue my people and my country, while preventing its disintegration preventing civil war and enabling justice to emerge again in Abkhazia¹⁷."

15. Zbigniew Bizizinsky, Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States : Document Data and Analysis. (New York, M.E. Sharp, 1997), p.586.

16. Zbigniew Bizizinski, No.15, p.588.

17. Ibid., P.237.

Thus, the Russo-Georgian relations started to improve further. In February 1994, Yeltsin and Pavel Grachev visited Tbilisi and signed the treaty of friendship and cooperation of 10 years with Shevardnadze. In this treaty Russia assured Georgia of sovereignty and territorial integrity¹⁸. This is very important for Georgia because the demand of the Abkhazian for separation from Georgia now hanged in balance. Russia now committed to assist Georgia in the creation of armed forces, their training and supply of the military equipments. More importantly, Russia retained the three military bases including the Black Sea naval base¹⁹. Georgia also agreed to not to support or participate in any alliance or blocs directed against Russia. Thus the treaty between Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan became null and void as it was directed against Russia. Russia further assured Georgia of all kinds of assistance for revival of the economy and state apparatus. Russia lifted the economic sanctions against Georgia. Further, Georgia entered into the ruble zone and thus united her economy with Russia²⁰. Other decisions taken in this agreement were cooperations in the area of science and technology, avoid double taxations, joint enterprises, and combined exploration and transportation of oil and natural

18. For details see the Text of Draft cooperation Treaty in Summary of the World Broadcasts, 22 March, 1993, SU/1643, B/1.

19. Hamner Adomeit "Russia as a great power in world affairs : image and realilty", International Affairs, Vol.71, No.1, Jan.1995, P.47.

20. Ibid.

gas²¹.

This treaty was the turning point in the history of Russo-Georgian relations, because this shaped the future course of relations of these two countries. After this treaty, Russia mediated between Georgia and Abkhazia and a cease-fire agreement was signed in July 1994. Russia also did not oppose the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), that came into Georgia on her request.

It is also important to discuss the geographical location and hence the strategic importance of Georgia which is a determining factor in Russo-Georgian relations. Georgia is adjacent to Caspian and Black Sea. These are also called Warm Water sea. They are very important in international trade because they are open throughout the year. As is known, Russia with its huge landmass is quite a land locked country. Though it has sea access in the western side but this is not useful because its Western coast freeze during winter season. So, for centuries one of the aims of Russian expansion and conquest of new land was to reach the warm waters of the South. This aim was realised during the Tsarist period mostly as a consequence of Russo-Ottoman wars. The October revolution which caused the disintegration of the Russian Empire did not change the geopolitical

21. Ibid.

reality. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of the new sovereign republics, once again Moscow's sea out-lets sharply shranked particularly in republics adjacent to the Black Sea, namely Ukraine and Georgia. Also after the collapse of the USSR, the regional players like Iran and Turkey are actively participating in this region. Russia and Ukraine have already confronted on the question of their naval forces in Black Sea. Russia has already withdrawn its Black Sea naval fleet on the Ukrainian side. Russia anyhow wanted its dominant position in this region, which is crucial for Russia's economic and military interests regardless of political and ideological orientation of the Kremlin leaders.

In this background one can understand why Russia wants Georgia in its zone of influence and its army presence there. This was also acknowledged in unusually honest language by the then Russian Defence Minister, Pavel Grachev, who said that "Russian troops should not leave Georgia because that would mean losing the Black Sea"²². At the same time Georgia has no such infrastructure to build its own army. The weak economic condition and instability further increased her difficulties.

In November 1994, Shevardnadze signed an agreement with

22. The Observer (London), 11 February, 1993.

Yeltsin regarding border patrol of Georgia²³. Due to this agreement more Russian troops entered Georgia for patrolling the Black Sea coast and Turkey-Georgia border. In fact, Russia fulfilled its one of the strategic goals with regard to the Transcaucasus region. As we know that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, many regional players, especially Turkey and Iran are targeting the Transcaucasus region. So, it would be dangerous for Russia if they become key partners in the domestic and political affairs of Transcaucasus countries.

In March 1995, Russia signed an agreement with Georgia on military cooperation that gave Russia the right to station a maximum of 25,000 troops free of charge at four more military bases for 25 years²⁴. These four new military bases are in the northern part of the Georgian border with Turkey and Armenia. The result is that Russian troops, which were to be withdrawn fully from Georgia by 1995 under a February 1993 agreement, will remain. More importantly, Tbilisi became the headquarters of the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus (GRFT)²⁵.

Thus, Russia can use Georgia as a point of leverage to

23. Martha Brill Dcott, "Sovereignty and the near abroad", Obris, Vol.39, No.3, Summer 1995, p.538.

24. Michael Mandelbun, The New Russian Foreign Policy, (A Council on Foreign Relation Book, USA, 1998), p.140.

25. Ibid.

exert influence over the entire Transcaucasia. Through Georgia's port of Batumi, oil and other supplies could be delivered to Armenia. And via Armenia and Russian presence at Georgian Seacoast, pressure could be kept on Azerbaijan.

However, by the end of 1995, Shevardnadze began to oppose the presence of Russian forces in Georgia. There were certain reasons for this. There were concrete evidences that in the process of modernising the Georgian army, Russia placed many Russian officers into the top positions²⁶. In this situation, Moscow became able to limit severely Georgia's scope for geopolitical manoeuvre and gained predominant influence over Georgia's security organs. This was unacceptable for Georgia. Many Georgian nationalist leaders had already criticised the presence of Russian army as an act of Russian hegemony²⁷. The danger that Russian troops can be used by local players for their own purposes was also demonstrated in Georgia. The Abkhazian separatists sometimes received military aid from the Russian troops²⁸. The Georgian government also complained about the failure of Russian troops to protect Georgian refugees who were able to return to Abkhazia but were repeatedly attacked by

26. David E. Mark, "Eurasia Letter: Russia and the New Transcaucasus", Foreign Policy, No.105, Winter 96-97, pp.141-159.

27. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 5 February 1996, SU/1914, F/1.

28. Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peace Keeping in Near Abroad", Survival, Vol.30, No.2, Autumn 1994, pp. 46-69.

Abkhazian separatists. So, due to all these factors, Shevardnadze attempted to avoid his dependence on the Russian peacekeeping force. He made an appeal to the United Nations and the OSCE to send more peace keeping force in Georgia²⁹. He even insisted on a timetable for the withdrawal of Russian forces with the deadline set at 31st December, 1995. While Russia hoped to obtain an agreement that would ensure their retention for a longer period.

Further, the Russo-Georgian relations on the issue of Russian peacekeeping force became strained when Shevardnadze tried to internationalise this issue. In a response to his letter to the United States of America, Bill Clinton said that "The United States would be inclined to support a peacekeeping operation in Georgia that would be neutral"³⁰. To add to this, the then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeline Albright said that "the deployment of the Russian peacekeeping troops must be temporary and should be under international scrutiny"³¹. Further the relations between the two on this issue became more strained in May 1996 when Russian army held a full scale exercise near Tbilisi³². Georgia heavily criticised it as it was against the

29. Leszek Buszynski, No.3, p.141.

30. Zbigniew Bizizinski, No.15, P.588.

31. Ibid, P.591.

32. Summary of the World Broadcasts 20 May 1996. SU/2615. F/1.

Georgian integrity and sovereignty. This was another example of Russian hegemony because army exercise in another country and without permission and earlier information is against international norms.

It is a fact that no country can be happy in allowing other country's troops to stay in its own territory. But it is also a fact that Russia, not the United Nations or any other Western country, will play dominant role in Abkhazia – both in keeping peace and in mediating the final settlement. Russia also is not willing to withdraw from this region and risk the political vacuum being filled by forces antagonistic towards Moscow. It will be better for both the countries if there would be balance in their interests.

Another reason for Georgia's apprehension was what is known as the "Russian Monroesky Doctrine". This was coined and promulgated by Yevgeny Primakov, the then Russian Federation's Director of Foreign Intelligence Service in September 1994. This doctrine recognizes the Russia's vital interests and special role in the former republics of the Soviet Union and legitimizes Russian intervention to protect them, by military means where deemed necessary³³. Further, the then Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev also spoke about

33. Roger E Kanet and Alexander V. Kozhemiakin, "The Foreign Policy of Russian Federation", (London, Macmillian Press, 1997), p.10.

the need for Russia to maintain a military presence in areas of the CIS “which for centuries had been the sphere of its military interests”³⁴.

Thus, Russia wanted to legitimise its military presence in the CIS. But in the Georgian eyes it was a revival of imperial Russia. It is worth noting that in Russian politics many ultranationalists emerged with mass popular support. They demanded a greater Russia. This caused greater concern in the CIS countries. In the CIS summit in Moscow on 21 October 1994, Shevardnadze supported the idea of creating a Euro-Asian union so that he could ease the pressure of Russia³⁵. Further, Shevardnadze also said that he wanted closer ties with the West for economic and military support.

But despite all these, Russia has little reason to fear. Due to weak economic and political conditions in CIS countries Russia can play a big role on its own terms.

Russia's role as a guarantor of peace and stability in this region has been also endorsed by others, particularly the Americans³⁶. Even the U.N. Security Council accepted Russia's role in this region as the ‘first and very

34. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report, 6 October 1994.

35. Interfax (Moscow) 23, October 1994.

36. The Sunday Times (London), 25 September 1994.

important³⁷. This has enhanced Russia's political leadership as an arbiter in the near abroad.

Another major irritant in the Russo-Georgian relationship was the NATO. After the post-Soviet period the newly independent countries became potential members for NATO. NATO also wanted to fill the created security vacuum due to collapse of the Soviet Union. The alleged Russian interference and political instability in the CIS forced them to look towards the NATO. Further, the presence of the Russian army in some of the CIS countries was also a major cause. Georgia was the best example of this.

In August 1992, Shevardnadze's opinion was that ..'if Russian troops can be in Georgia then NATO's troops should also be here'³⁸. The daunting fear of losing Abkhazia and Russian support to the separatists forced Shevardnadze to make this opinion. As the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict was going on and following the Georgian National Guards humiliating defeat in Abkhazia, Shevardnadze visited the NATO headquarters in Brussels in 1993 and asked the alliance to take an active part in the search for a solution to the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia³⁹.

37. Zbigniew Bizizinski, No.15, P.590.

38. International Herald Tribune, (Paris), 21 August, 1992.

39. The Independent, (London), 24 June, 1993.

But the war in Abkhazia forced Georgia into a complete reorientation of its foreign policy. Western support for Georgia was extremely limited. After the 1994 friendship treaty, Georgia became less attractive for the NATO. The simple reason was that Russia did not want any CIS country to join NATO. It posed a great danger to the Russian security. If Georgia became a member of NATO, all aspects of the Russian policy in the Transcaucasia would have eventually failed. So Russia would thwart any attempt in this direction. It is also important for Russia to create a friendly environment and maintain the Georgian unity.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the economy became the most important factor for shaping the foreign policy of the CIS countries. Just after the independence, Georgian economy was feeble, collapse of the state enterprises and acute shortage of essential commodities forced Georgia to look towards Russia. But after the 1995, situation became different. Georgian economy began improving. Some amount of foreign investment especially from I.M.F. World Bank, Germany and U.S.A. also came in. In the domestic front, Shevardnadze improved his position. By winning with 75 percent votes in the presidential election, he established order in home affairs. Thus, the state now became viable. In this situation Georgia did not want to be solely dependent upon Russia for solving its economic problems.

Shevardnadze visited many western countries especially Germany, France and Britain to woo investments in 1995⁴⁰. Western countries responded to Georgia's appeal and funds started coming from these countries. Now, the situation is that Russia is losing its position in Georgia as the traditional market dominator and Georgian dependence on Russia is drastically decreasing. Turkey is now Georgia's main trading partner. The main source of credits and assistance came from the West and not from Russia as was the case earlier. In May 1996, Georgia signed a cooperation and partnership agreement with the European Union⁴¹. For Georgia, it was very important for revival of its economy. But in Russian eyes it was nothing but eastward expansion of European Union⁴².

This is a peculiar situation for Russia. It cannot provide more money to Georgia as it itself is cash-strapped. At the same time it did not want the western countries to enter Georgia with their heavy investment. So a compromise formula was worked out between Russia and Georgia. In June 1997, Primakov visited Georgia and said that "Russia would not oppose Georgia's new economic policy and foreign investments and Russia would be happy to see a flourishing

40. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 20 February, 1996, SU/2522, F/1.

41. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 1 May, 1996, SU/2600, F/1.

42. Ibid.

Georgia”⁴³. Shevardnadze responded with this acceptance the “Russia has its interests in the Transcaucasus region and Georgia would fully abide by this”⁴⁴. These definitely led to a better understanding between the two countries where economic interests were concerned.

With the recent discovery of Oil and Natural Gas in the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, Transcaucasia has become the hot-spot in international economy and politics. Moreover, the resource rich Caspian and Black Sea states have relatively small population. So, most of their oil and gas is likely to be exported, making this region a useful counter balance to the Middle East. For the western oil companies this region holds further attraction. Unlike the majority of the world proven oil reserves, these resources are likely to be available for exploitation by them. Iran and Iraq, the underdeveloped giants of Persian Gulf, are closed to the outsiders. So, for the moment the oil firms are concentrating hard on this region.

Georgia is becoming the center of attention as it can also provide the best possible transporting route without depending on Russia. For Georgia, oil can help in stabilising its economy. Georgia is already earning 8 million dollars per

43. International Herald Tribune (Paris), 15 January, 1997.

44. Ibid.

annum as the pipeline fee⁴⁵ from the pipeline which passes through Supsa and Baku. Now Georgia wants to further increase its income. So, it signed many deals with other countries.

In 1996, Georgia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with British oil firm JKC oil⁴⁶. A Black Sea ferry link was established for transporting oil between Ukraine and Georgia in 1996⁴⁷. Azerbaijan also established link with the Georgian port town Supsa.

Now the danger for Russia is that the Western countries want to limit Russia's influence and its pretensions of playing a leading political and military role by establishing direct projects and creating export routes. Georgia can play as an axis between the Western market and the Caspian region without crossing Russia. It has already become a transit route for Uzbek cotton. For the first time Uzbekistan has been able to get its cotton to foreign markets without crossing Russian territory⁴⁸. This resulted in a huge loss for Russia who used to get handsome royalty.

Further, Russia also wanted a greater stake in the oil

45. The Wall Street Journal (Europe), 9 October, 1995.

46. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 5 February, 1996, SU/2525, F/1.

47. Reuter European Business Report, 16 December, 1996.

48. International Herald Tribune (Paris), 14 January, 1997.

and gas business in this region. But Georgia's possible emergence as trading crossroad minus Russia will hamper the Russian efforts to earn foreign currency. This will also end the Caucasus dependence on Russian energy supply. So in 1996, Russia declared its intention that "it is interested in control over new oil pipeline across Georgia"⁴⁹.

There is always a possibility that if Georgia starts to pump oil into international market then no longer it would be in Russia's zone of influence. But one thing should be clear that Moscow would be able to deal a hard blow to ethnically and politically divided Georgia if Russia's interests in the Caucasus were threatened. Two recent events illustrate Russia's power over Georgia. A Ukrainian oil ship was taken over by Russian border guards in the Georgian territorial waters; and the day before Shevardnadze visited Ajaria, Tbilisi's streets were the scene of Russian tank manoeuvres allegedly to arrest terrorists⁵⁰. After the Georgian parliament demanded the withdrawal of Russian border guards, the Director of Russia's Border Guard Service, General Nikolaev, after an emergency visit to Tbilisi, declared "let's not feed illusions. Russians have always been in Georgia and they will stay"⁵¹.

49. Summary of the World Broadcasts, 12 August, 1996, SU/2877, F/1.

50. Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol.48, No51, 1996.

51. Moscow News, 31, December, 1996.

Another contentious issue in the Russo-Georgian relationship is about the enriched Uranium in Georgia. Georgia wants to sell the enriched Uranium to earn some money. For this purpose, there was a deal between Georgia and the U.S.A.⁵² U.S.A. was willing to pay \$100,000 for buying the enriched Uranium from Georgia. When Russia got the hint of this deal, it opposed. Russia claimed that it should get the first chance to buy this Uranium. Therefore, Russia forced Georgia to cancel the deal with the U.S.A. In turn, Russia promised to buy those enriched Uranium. But till date Russia has not taken any step in this direction. Georgian authorities are infuriated by this and telling Russia to buy it as soon as possible. But the fact is that Russia itself is cash-strapped and is not in a position to pay for those enriched Uranium.

Therefore, it is obvious from the developments and discussions of Russo-Georgian relationship that it has not been in a straight line. There were many ups and downs. Sometimes narrow interests were the reasons for this. Leaders of both countries were driven by their own national interest.

At the same time both the countries have acted in matured and pragmatic ways to solve the problems. Russia helped Georgia in many ways. Simultaneously, Georgia had to pay the price for Russian support. The cooperation in the

52. New York Times (New York), 14 January, 1998.

areas of strategic importance and economy has been mutually beneficial. It is a fact that there is a great deal of Russian influence in Georgia and Georgia just cannot ignore the presence of a very powerful neighbour. However, Georgia has established its own identity and was not totally overwhelmed by Russia.

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

The disintegration of Soviet Union created a new international scenario. Before its disintegration, cold war had already ended and the establishment of a unipolar world order began to emerge. Russia owing to its military might, manpower and huge size came to be seen as the inheritor of the Soviet legacy. However, disintegration also posed numerous problems before Russia, mainly economic. It also had to redefine its relationship with the fourteen newly independent states. Towards the beginning, Russia had to look towards the Western World, which alone in its perception could have been of some help in rescuing it from its economic mess. But it soon realised that this was neither sufficient nor healthy for its economic reconstruction. The limited help it got from the Western World also brought with it lot of compromises, which Russia had to make to appease its benefactors. Russia's foreign policy was affected the most and had to be almost redefined. The fourteen newly independent states which were termed the 'near abroad' by the Russian foreign policy makers were accorded top priority in the newly emerged scenario. The policy towards these states was guided by strategic and economic considerations. These states had also been badly hit by the economic recession and had started looking towards the West for financial aid. This would have meant not only economic

loss for Russia which had been considering these as its prospective market but this could have also posed serious strategic problems.

Georgia is one of these fourteen states which is geo-strategically important for Russia. It strategically acts as a buffer state for Russia in the Trans-caucasian region. Located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, it also has immense economic importance for Russia. It is against this background that we have to analyse the Russo-Georgian relations. It was imperative on the part of Russia to keep Georgia under its sphere of influence and the Russian desperate efforts towards achieving this can be seen in the events that followed Soviet Union's disintegration.

Georgia was embroiled in problems immediately after independence. Rise of nationalism, which was a pre-independence phenomenon in Georgia, took the shape of full fledged intense ethnic conflicts after 1989. Georgia also had to create an identity of its own on the global scenario. Under the socialist structure Georgia was tied with the Soviet Union in a relationship which was largely based on 'interdependence and cooperation'. This relationship penetrated almost all the important aspects viz. economy, polity and strategy (chiefly defence). Disintegration posed new challenges before Georgia which initially saw it toeing a westward policy.

The rise of Gamsakhurdia in Georgia was a setback for Russia. He banked on an anti-Russia policy to mobilise support in his favour and emerged successful. But he soon took to dictatorial ways which led to his downfall. His anti-minority policies saw rising hostilities and intensification of the ethnic conflicts. Slowly the public opinion became hostile to him with growing dissatisfaction with his nationalistic policy and economic degeneration.

Russia's efforts towards creating the CIS was meant to keep its influence in the new republics intact and to prevent the encroachment of West in this region which would have both strategically and economically harmed Russian interests. The refusal of Georgia to join the CIS created fissures in the Russo-Georgian relations. This phase also saw a civil war waged in Georgia against dictatorial Gamsakhurdia which resulted in his running away from his country. Gamsakhurdia accused Russia for his woes but actually he dug his own grave by following extreme policies. His policies even kept the Western countries away from lending their support to him.

The coming of Shevardnadze at the helm of Georgian affairs marked the beginning of a new phase in Russo-Georgian relations. Given his administrative experience and his closeness to Russian leaders, particularly Yeltsin, a better

Russo-Georgian relations were expected. Meanwhile the problems in Georgia had intensified. The civil war and ethnic conflicts completely crippled Georgian economy. Still Georgia remained against joining the CIS even in the face of little help coming from the Western countries. The situation worsened further when the Abkhaz rebels captured Sukhumi and the Georgian army had to withdraw from there. Available evidence suggests that the Abkhazians did receive Russian support in their endeavour. Shevardnadze on several occasions accused Russia directly for the Georgian problems. Russia's sole objective behind all this was to draw Georgia in its fold. Russia's imposition of economic sanctions against Georgia was also a step towards achieving this objective. Georgia was definitely passing through a bad phase.

It was against this background that Georgia decided to join the CIS. This fulfilled Russian aspirations and the post 1993 phase saw slow improvement in Russo-Georgian relations. Russia mediated in the Abkhaz problem and this led to cessation of hostilities and an agreement establishing peace. The 1994 accord proved a milestone in Russo-Georgian relations and led to cooperation between the two in almost all the fields. The agreement to allow Russian army's presence in Georgia was a great diplomatic success for Russia and firmly established Russian influence in the Transcaucasian region.

However, certain matters in the Russo-Georgian relations remained unresolved. The most important among this was the Abkhaz issue. Though Abkhazians achieved military success but this remained unrecognized by the international community. Georgia under no condition wants to part with this and the peace in this region completely depends on Russian peacekeepers. In fact Russia itself doesn't seem to be in favour of an amicable solution to this problem. This can be utilised by Russia as a trump card to check Georgia from resorting to any anti-Russian policy in future. However, the Abkhazian conflict has also posed several problems for Russia too. If Russia in order to improve its relations with Georgia takes any anti-Abkhazian stand, its repercussion can be felt even in the Russian North Caucasus region where anti-Russia sentiments would gain strength. Further, if Russian pressure induced Abkhazia to accept autonomy rather than independence' Georgia will be less dependent on Russia. The strategic gains that Moscow has made may become less secure For the time being Russia would like the present situation to prevail which ensures its army's presence there in the name of peacekeeping.

Personalities also played an important role in shaping Russo-Georgian relations. If Gamsakhurdia was good at alienating people and making enemies out of friends, Shevardnadze was just the opposite - he was very good at

attracting people and making friends out of enemies. He took charge under adverse conditions but succeeded not only in strengthening Russo-Georgian relations but also created an independent identity of Georgia in the international community. He proved himself a skilful political gambler.

Georgia definitely has tried hard to create an independent identity of its own after independence depending on its geo-strategic importance. In order to boost its economy it has been trying to improve its relationship with the Western World. Being an important link in the Caspian oil trade route has helped its cause a lot and the Western World, Turkey and Iran are all keen to establish good relations with Georgia. Russia, reeling under its own economic predicament, is not in a position to bail out Georgia. It is therefore imperative on the part of Georgia to look out for external sources of aid. The possibility of NATO and European Union's expansion has opened new opportunities for Georgia. But, Georgia has to strike a balance in its relations with the West and Russia. It can try to garner western help to rejuvenate its economy but at the same time cannot bear the brunt of Russian ire by distancing from it.

Russia cannot stand aloof from what is going on in Georgia. If the Balkans are the powder keg of Europe, then Georgia is the powder keg of Caucasus, and unfortunately, in

Russia's backyard in the South. Moscow must first of all come to its grips with the existing realities in Georgia.

Russia's complexity of strategic interests there, from geopolitical and economic to the problems of the Russian-speaking population and the grouping of forces, has taken shape over a long period of time. It is pretty clear that Russian policy towards Georgia, not only in the foreseeable future, as far as that is possible at the moment, but in the very long term should be shaped by concern for its own interests, rather than by the problems of the latest Georgian political leader be it Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, or some one else.

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