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FROM THE HISTORY OF COOPERATION AMONG THE CAUCASIAN POLITICAL ÉMIGRÉS: 1921-THE EARLY 1940S

Abstract

The author concentrates on the key aspects of cooperation among the Caucasian political émigrés between 1921 and the early 1940s, a subject that until recently has remained at the margins of historical studies.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

For centuries, the Caucasian peoples maintained military-political, economic, and cultural cooperation among themselves albeit with different intensity: in fact, military-political cooperation was cut short by Russia which conquered the entire region. It was resumed in 1917, when the Russian Empire ceased to exist. Georgia maintained especially close relations with Azerbaijan and the Mountain Republic, which is amply confirmed by the documents relating to the relations between the Georgians and their Caucasian neighbors in 1918-1921 now kept at the State Historical Archives of Georgia.¹

Occupation and invasive Sovietization of the independent Caucasian republics forced their governments into emigration, mainly to Europe. Their cooperation continued abroad where they decided to set up the single anti-Bolshevist center; the efforts went on in the Caucasus and abroad.

Cooperation among the Caucasian Political Émigrés in the 1920s-1930s

On 8 May, 1921, when Sovietization of the Caucasus had been going on for nearly twelve months, a meeting in Paris brought together representatives of the Caucasian émigrés. Georgia was

¹ See: The Central State Historical Archives of Georgia, Record group 1861, Inventory 1, Files 58, 655; Inventory 2, Files 3, 13; Record group 1864, Inventory 1, Files 25, 28; Record group 1969, Inventory 2, File 34; Record group 2037, Inventory 1, File 7.

represented by E. Gegechkori, N. (K.) Chkheidze, N. Ramishvili, G. Veshapeli, K. Sabakhtarashvili, and M. Sumbatashvili; Azerbaijan by A. Sheikhuslamov, D. Hajibekov, M. Magarramov, and A. Topchibashev; Armenia by A. Agaronian, A. Khatisian, and N. Bekzadian; while Chechen A. Chermoev represented the Northern Caucasus.

They outlined the ways the Bolshevik regime in the Caucasus could be removed and decided to set up a united Caucasian bloc. On 10 June, the participants signed an agreement on setting up a Council of the Union of the Caucasian Republic to present the Bolsheviks with a united front.²

On 2 October, in Istanbul, the newly formed United Information Bureau of the Caucasian Republics was entrusted with recognizing independence of the Caucasian republics, ensuring unconditional recognition of the right to self-determination of all Caucasian peoples, setting up a democratic platform of struggle, establishing the people's rule, liquidating large landed properties, and transferring land to the peasants as private property.³

On 9 November, Caucasian émigrés gathered in Paris for another meeting; they decided, among other things, to set up a Headquarters of the Caucasian Military Affairs in Paris and move the core of the general commands closer to the Caucasus.⁴

In November 1924, the Caucasian Liberatory Committee was set up in Istanbul on the Basis of the Caucasian Confederation, an event with a political, as well as moral-psychological effect. The act was signed by representatives of the Georgian and Azerbaijan republics and the mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus. On the Georgian side, it was signed by members of the National-Democratic Party Mikhail Tsereteli, David Vachnadze, and Alexander Asatiani; on the Azeri side, by Khosrov Sultan-zadeh, Abdullah Ali Emirjan, and Sheikh-ul-Islam-zadeh; and on the North Caucasian side, by Circassian Haytek Namitov, Chechen Vasan-Girey Jabagi, and Osset Alikhan Kantemir.⁵

Émigré groups from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Northern Caucasus, Ukraine, and Turkestan of the Prometheus Society set up in Warsaw in 1925 were the best organized among the Caucasian émigré structures which sprang into existence all over the world.

Muhammad-Saeed Shamil (1901-1981), grandson of Imam Shamil, the recognized leader of the North Caucasian diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East and a founder and leader of the People's Party of the Caucasian Mountain Dwellers, played an important role in Prometheus.⁶

The Armenian émigrés who found it hard to find a common language with the Azeris preferred to keep away from the political gatherings of the Caucasian émigrés; it was decided to enlist the Georgians to draw the Armenians, in any form, into a common Caucasian organization. In 1933, an Armenian-Georgian Union under David Vachnadze was set up only to expire soon thereafter.

In May 1933, the Committee of Caucasian Independence published a draft Pact of the Caucasian Confederation and an Address to the Peoples of the Caucasus on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of restored independence.

On 14 June, 1934, the document was signed in Brussels by former Chairman of the National Council of Azerbaijan Muhammad Emin Rasulzade, who headed the National Center, former Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan and later speaker of the republic's parliament Alimardan bek Topchibashev, who headed the delegation, former chairman of the government of the Georgian Democratic Republic Noah Zhordania, former ambassador plenipotentiary to France Akaki Chkhenkeli, and Mamed Girey Sunshi, Ibrahim Chulik, and Tausultan Shakman from the Northern Caucasus.

² See: *The Court Case of the Parity Committee of the Anti-Soviet Parties of Georgia (Indictment)*, Tbilisi, 1925, pp. 8-9 (in Georgian).

³ See: R. Grdzeldze, *Popular Uprising of 1924 in Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1992, p. 12 (in Georgian).

⁴ See: N. Kirtadze, *The Revolt of 1924 in Georgia*, Kutaisi, 1996, pp. 120-123 (in Georgian).

⁵ See: R. Daushvili, "Kavkazskaia konfederatsia," *Kavkazskiy vestnik*, Tbilisi, No. 3, 2001, p. 130.

⁶ See: A. Murtazaliev, *Pisateli Daghestanskogo zarubezhia (Bibliograficheskiy spravochnik)*, Makhachkala, 2006, p. 63.

The Pact formulated the fundamental principles of the Caucasian Confederation based on mutual equality. The elected Caucasian Council and its Presidium as an executive structure were expected to guide the liberation struggle in the Caucasus. The Pact said:

- “*The national centers of Azerbaijan, the Northern Caucasus, and Georgia,*
- “taking into consideration that nations can develop freely only when completely independent,
- “being convinced that this aim can hardly be achieved without pooling the forces of the entire Caucasus within the common borders,
- “being confident that in this way each of the Caucasian nations will acquire real guarantees of its sovereignty needed to develop in full its intellectual and material forces,
- “being confident that by adopting the underlying principles of the Union of the Caucasian Republic they will have their compatriots on their side,
- “agreeing that the confederation as a political form of the Caucasian states is suggested by their geographic and economic unity, declare the following principles of the Caucasian Confederation:
 - “1. While preserving the national specifics of each of the republics and ensuring their sovereignty, outside the region the Caucasian Confederation shall act in the name of all the republics as an international unit of the highest order. The Confederation shall have a common political and customs border.
 - “2. The foreign policy of the republics which belong to the Confederation shall be entrusted to its corresponding structures.
 - “3. The borders shall be defended by the army of the Confederation made up of the armies of its members; its united command shall take orders from the leading bodies of the Confederation.
 - “4. Any disagreements that might arise among the republics which belong to the Confederation and which cannot be settled through direct talks shall be referred to the Arbitration or Supreme Court of the Confederation of the republics (that belong to the Confederation), the corresponding structures of which are duty bound to accept the rulings without changes and to execute the rulings of the Supreme Court.
 - “5. An expert commission shall draft, in the near future, the Constitution of the Caucasus with due account of the above. This draft shall serve as the starting point for the first Constituent Assemblies of each of the republics.
 - “6. The Pact has reserved a place for the Armenian Republic.”⁷

The Pact was given positive coverage in the European press. In 1934, Noah Zhordania wrote in his article which appeared in the Paris-based Georgian newspaper *Brdzolis khma* (The Voice of Struggle): “The Pact of the Caucasian Confederation ... is not an improvisation, a piece of news invented and worded abroad. It arrived from the Caucasus and is prompted by the vital needs and necessities of the people who live there. We have merely shaped it into a legal form, formulated its status, and enforced in writing the freedom struggle waged in our country by all nationalities: Azeris, Georgians, Armenians, and mountain dwellers. From time immemorial, these four peoples have been living side by side in the same territory and have been tied and are still tied by their vital interests. None of them can move ahead without others; none of them can fall into a precipice without taking the others along with it.

⁷ *Samshoblo* (Motherland), A national-democratic monthly, Paris, No. 16, 1934 (in Georgian).



"In the 19th century the entire Caucasus lost its freedom when Georgia lost its; in the 20th century Georgia lost its freedom after the Caucasus lost its. This is the way it was in the past and this is the way it will be in the future: either united in freedom or separated in slavery. History leaves us no other option. The Caucasian peoples have accepted this; they are fighting all together against tyranny.

"Our Pact is a legal description of our present struggle and our future victory... The Caucasian peoples which side with the Pact call on all subjugated nationalities and nations of the Soviet Union to destroy, by concerted efforts, communist tyranny and create a common foundation of freedom and good-neighborliness for all nations and peoples."⁸

On 15 September, 1934, the tenth anniversary of the Caucasian Confederation, the Georgian colony in Warsaw gathered together representatives of the Caucasian colonies, as well as Poles and Ukrainians. The Georgians were headed by Kote Imnadze, the Azeris by Mirza Bala, and the North Caucasians by Mamed Girey Sunshi.

Kote Imnadze, chairman of the Georgian colony and political committee, opened the meeting; he used Polish to tell the story of the revolt of 1924 and its results; he pointed out that since the liberation initiative of the Caucasian peoples had been repeatedly suppressed, they should pool their forces to achieve independence as their goal and added that the Pact had been created with the same aim in view.

In May 1935, the Georgian colony took part in the burial ceremony with Marshal Josef Pilsudski, an outstanding Polish statesman and military leader and a friend and patron of the Caucasian émigrés.

In September 1936, a session of the Caucasian Confederation listened to the reports of those who represented Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Northern Caucasus, etc; on 25 September, they presented their extraordinary document to Carlos Saavedra Lamas, who chaired the XVII meeting of the League of Nations; several days later, on 28 September, they handed him a Memorandum and Pact signed by the representatives of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Northern Caucasus. The memorandum said, in part, that the Caucasian peoples fighting for independence were convinced that progressive mankind was on their side.⁹

The Caucasian Confederation maintained close ties with similar structures set up by other peoples who in the past had formed parts of the Russian Empire.

The Press of the Caucasian Political Émigrés

At different times, and in different European cities, Caucasian émigrés published journals which dealt with Caucasian issues. Published under different titles, they all used the Russian language to be understood by all Caucasian émigrés, irrespective of nationality.

In 1929, the People's Party of the Mountain Dwellers of the Caucasus published the *Gortsy Kavkaza* (The Mountain Dwellers of the Caucasus) journal in Paris, which appeared in Russian under the editorship of Tambiy Elekkhoti.¹⁰ From time to time, Georgians contributed to the journal. Issue 2-3 for 1929, for example, carried an article by Georgian National-Democrat Georgi Gvazava called "Dobrovoltsy russkogo imperializma" (The Volunteers of Russian Imperialism).¹¹

In 1929, the *Nezavisimiy Kavkaz* (The Independent Caucasus) was started in Paris, which its cover described as the Organ of Caucasian Confederalist Thought. Issue 2 for 1930 carried an article by Georgian National-Democrat David (Data) Vachnadze entitled "Problema Kavkazskoy konfederatsii" (The Problem of the Caucasian Confederation).

⁸ N. Zhordania, "The Caucasian Confederation," *Brdzolis khma*, Paris, No. 45, 1934 (in Georgian).

⁹ See: R. Daushvili, op. cit., pp. 130-132.

¹⁰ See: Z. Khuako, *Mir pechaty Adyghei*, Maykop, 2003, p. 473.

¹¹ See: G. Sharadze, *History of Georgian Émigré Journalism*, Vol. 8, Tbilisi, 2005, p. 408 (in Georgian).

In 1930-1931, one issue of the *Kavkaz* journal, mostly pro-Armenian, appeared in Riga; it carried an article by former Tbilisi Governor General Shalva Maglakelidze (1894-1976) called "Gruzia (istoricheskiy obzor i perspektivy)" (Georgia: an Outline of the Past and Look into the Future) and a poem called "Georgia" and signed by A.D.¹²

In 1934-1935, the People's Party of the Mountain Dwellers of the Caucasus published a monthly *Severny Kavkaz* (The Northern Caucasus) in Turkish and Russian in Warsaw. Edited by Barasbi Baytugan it was, in fact, a publication of the Adighe émigrés which replaced the *Gortsy Kavkaza*.

Issue 10, which appeared in February 1935, informed readers: "The present issue offers readers official information by the Presidium of the recently formed Caucasian Confederation about the newly established Council of the Caucasian Confederation which will be in charge of all political initiatives relating to the Caucasus. This is intended to strengthen the Caucasian union realized by the Pact of the Caucasian Confederation signed on 14 July in Brussels.

"We interpret this as a logical step taken by the patriotically-minded Caucasians; we hail the newly established united Caucasian structure and wish it every success in dealing with its tasks."¹³

In 1934-1939, the *Kavkaz* and *Zaria Kavkaza* journals appeared in Paris in Russian, German, English, Italian, and Turkish under the editorship of former Foreign Minister of the Mountain Republic Heydar Bammatt (1890-1965). He published articles on world and Caucasian political issues, his own deliberations on the future of the Caucasus and the Caucasian diaspora; he signed some of his books and articles on Islamic subjects with his pseudonym Georges Rivoir.¹⁴

In 1936, the *Nezavisimost Kavkaza* (The Caucasian Independence) journal was published in Berlin in French under Heydar Bammatt as its editor. In June 1937, the *Kavkaz* journal published in Paris acquired a Georgian language edition; in Paris it was edited by Iosif Gvaramadze; the issues published in Berlin were edited by David Sagirashvili; its cover described it as a "monthly of independent national thought."

The journal attracted Georgian (Zurab Avalishvili, Shalva Amirejibi, Vladimir Akhmeteli, Revaz Gabashvili, Grigol Diasamidze, Mikhail Kedia, Georgi Kvinitadze, Alexander Nikuradze, and others) as well as Abkhazian (Vladimir Emkhvari), Azeri (Asad-bey and Khasan-bey Aliev), and North Caucasian (Heydar Bammatt and Alikhan Kantemir) émigrés; West European politicians (Enrico Insabato and others) sometimes also contributed to it.¹⁵

In his article "Politicheskies arabeski" (Political Arabesques), which appeared in the journal in 1937, prominent Georgian scholar Zurab Avalishvili wrote: "The independence of the Baltic republics was achieved without pooling them together into one state. The Caucasian republics failed to preserve their independence. Political, military, and economic disunity proved to be fairly harmful for all of them.

"No matter what form their unification might take it should protect, in the best way possible, all the Caucasian peoples and keep them away from dissention and discord. It seems that for the sake of this the Caucasian nations will be prepared to obey, to a certain extent, discipline and the common Caucasian statehood."¹⁶

In his article "Aktions-programma kavkazskikh natsiy" (the Program of Action of the Caucasian Nations), former ambassador of Georgia to Germany Vladimir (Lado) Akhmeteli clearly identified the journal's program and aim as bringing all the Caucasian peoples into a single confederation. He wrote on this score: "The shared historical existence, communal closeness caused by the geopolitical conditions, and similar customs and rites serve as a firm foundation for their complete unification. Many peoples invaded our common homeland to subjugate it. Some of them succeeded. They tempo-

¹² See: *Ibidem*.

¹³ See: Z. Khuako, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

¹⁴ See: A. Murtazaliev, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁵ See: G. Sharadze, *op. cit.*, pp. 398-400.

¹⁶ See: Z. Avalishvili, "Political Arabesques," *The Caucasus*, Paris, No. 1, 1937 (in Georgian).



rarily captured our lands, enslaved those who lived on them, caused dissent among them, and fanned bloody fratricidal wars. The communities who have been living in the Caucasus from time immemorial still survived and preserved their racial features, languages, customs, morals, and traditions. Their love of their motherland taught them to believe they need a common Caucasian statehood. Wise Iliia Chavchavadze, whose birth centenary we are celebrating today, addressed all the Caucasian nations with: "Either we shall perish all together or we shall flourish together."¹⁷

The Caucasian émigré press was intended to bring the positions of the Caucasian political organizations closer together to unify them for the sake of fighting for their common aim.

World War II and the Position of the Caucasian Political Émigrés

The radically-minded Caucasian political émigrés were convinced that the road to freedom lay through Germany's victory over the Soviet Union; this served as the rationale for pro-German organizations of Caucasian émigrés in Paris and Berlin. On 30 January, 1937, Colonel Shalva Maglakelidze (since 1944 general of the Wehrmacht) stood at the head of Sakartvelos fashisturi darazmuloba (The Fascist Unit of Georgia) based on the Georgian patriotic organization Tetri Giorgi (White St. George). The newly-formed structure published the *Kartlosi* journal.¹⁸

In 1937, the organization published a book called *Polozhenia k deiatelnosti i borbe* (The Provisions of Activities and Struggle) in Paris, Point XIV of which said: "Georgia and the Caucasus form a single whole, a close unity of the peoples of the Caucasus is a must. Georgia and the Caucasus form an indivisible whole geographically as well as politically, economically, and culturally. This is proven by the ancient and recent history of the Caucasus. This means that close unity among the Caucasian peoples is a must."¹⁹

Guided by the principle "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," the right radicals among the Caucasian émigrés hailed the German attack on the Soviet Union. Driven by the hope of liberating their homeland from the Bolsheviks, some of them joined the German army on 22 June, 1941.

The memoirs of well-known Georgian émigré Mikhail Kavtaradze (1906-2008) describe the mutually exclusive sentiments popular in the Georgian and other Caucasian political structures of the time: "The war caused ruptures among some of the Georgian émigrés; some were rapturous, some people were suspicious, others plainly at a loss ... There were those who had dedicated twenty years of their lives to the freedom struggle and had never enlisted true allies. When Germany, the only possible ally among the big states very much interested in crumbling the Russian Empire, attacked Russia, the Georgians interpreted this as a negative development. Indeed, Germany was ruled by a hardly likable regime; more than that: this Germany was fighting not only Russia but also the fairly likable democratic countries."²⁰

It should be said that the members of the government in exile, prominent Social-Democrats, flatly refused to cooperate with the Germans. On 14 February, 1940, in Paris, leader of the Georgian Social-Democrats Noah Zhordania was very critical about the expansionist policy of Nazi Germany in the presence of the members of the Constituent Assembly of independent Georgia in exile.²¹ He

¹⁷ See: V. Akhmeteli, "The Program of Action of the Caucasian Nations," *The Caucasus*, Paris, No. 2, 1937.

¹⁸ See: G. Sharadze, op. cit., p. 97.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

²⁰ M. Kavtaradze, *100 Years of Life (reminiscences, publicist writings, translations, poetry)*, Tbilisi, 2007, pp. 111-112 (in Georgian).

²¹ See: N. Kikvadze, "National-Socialism and Georgian Professors," *Droni* (The Times), Tbilisi, No. 16-19, 1993 (in Georgian).

said: "I refuse to believe that the German state, which without qualms destroys the independence of free nations, will help to restore Georgian independence. Our future is tied to the democratic states which alone respect the freedom of others."²² This cost him his freedom when the Germans entered Paris.²³

Other prominent Caucasian scholars, politicians, and the military (there were Georgians among them: Z. Avalishvili, Sh. Amirejibi, V. Akhmeteli, L. Kereselidze, G. Kvinitadze, Sh. Maglakelidze, M. Tsereteli, and others) were of a different opinion. Even before World War II, they had been looking at Germany in the hope of finding a worthy place for their homeland in the future "victorious Third Reich."²⁴

These people hoped that, if victorious, Germany would help the Caucasian countries restore their independence, as happened in May 1918. It should be said that the Nazi regime gave practically no grounds for such hopes.

During World War II, this cooperation was especially intensive; the radically-minded Caucasian, as well as Slavic (including Russian) émigrés fought together with the Germans against Bolshevism, their common enemy. This fact, however, goes beyond the chronological frameworks of the present article.

C o n c l u s i o n

When the Red Army occupied the independent Caucasian republics (the Mountain Republic, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia), some of the members of their governments had to emigrate. Starting in 1921, Caucasian émigrés frequently met in Istanbul, Paris, Brussels, Warsaw, and elsewhere to discuss burning issues; their cooperation continued until the war between Germany and the Soviet Union and left a certain trace in the political history of the Caucasus.

²² M. Tougouchi-Caianee, *URSS face au problème de Nationalités*, Luttich, 1947, p. 349.

²³ See: N. Kikvadze, *op. cit.*

²⁴ See: N. Javakhishvili, "The Attempt at Restoring the Kingdom of Georgia during World War II," *A History*, Tbilisi, No. 1, 1993 (in Georgian).