

# **Foreign policy and orientation of the administration of independent Georgia (April-August 1991)**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the foreign policy orientation of the Independent Georgian government in April-August 1991. It analyses the relations Georgia had on international arena in that period. Georgia apparently had the most intensive relations with the existing and the former Republics of the USSR. It is worth mentioning that the best and most intensive were the relations with the Baltic Republics. The contacts with neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan were also comparatively close. Georgia signed some treaties of political and economical character with them.

The interrelations mutual solidarity were continued with the East European countries of so called "Socialist countries" which had already become the independent countries (Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and others). Those countries could not at that time recognize Georgia's independence but they tried as far as was possible, to express moral support; the economical-cultural relations were accented to develop.

The National Government of the independent Georgia aimed to have interrelations with other countries of the world as well, which was difficult to realize because of the serious obstacles. The fact that Georgia's independence was not recognized at that time represented the main barrier for the relations. The countries of the Western democracies avoided such official ties and the relations were limited to the humanitarian sphere.

Despite this fact, the tendency of growing interest towards Georgia was obvious. Till the August 1991, Georgia's new government also tries also to fix pro-western orientation. But the processes could not develop in positive way. The international political attitude to the former Soviet republic which had announced their independence, unfortunately changed in unfavorable way. Georgia appeared to be in political isolation. That was conditioned by the demands of the so called mainstream policy and global interests of the USA and USSR. The

interests of Georgia were temporarily sacrificed to agreement between the Soviet Union and the USA on reduction of the strategic armament.

It was also a mistake made by the Georgian Government which took a hard-line position towards the USA administration thus aiding to the process of international isolation of Georgia.

**Key words:** *Foreign Policy, Independence, relationships, Soviet Union, Georgia, West, Referendum, Isolation.*

After announcing the Independence of Georgia, the recognition and acknowledgement of the country by the foreign countries became the main objective of the Georgian Government. Our research work is aiming to study the activities of Zviad Gamsakhurdia Government during April-August in 1991, in order to reach this aim; our goal also is to find out which ties were established or which ones could not be reached to establish; what subjective and objective causes played role in blocking the full size interrelations of Georgia with other countries in the given period.

This episode of the Georgian history has never been specially studied in the Georgian historiography. There are some important works on the Georgian history in which the authors touch this question but the mentioned period is only briefly observed, such as: Ucha Bluashvili (“The political history of Georgia 1987-2003”; the publishing house “Universali”; Tbilisi, 2015); Steven Jones (“Georgia – Political History after announcing independence”; the centre of social sciences; Tbilisi, 2012); Dimitri Shvelidze (“Political infighting and overthrowing of the Government in Georgia in 1987-1992”; the publishing house “Universali”; Tbilisi, 2008).

On March 31, 1991 the referendum on Independence conducted and Georgia declared an independent country, the international relations of Georgia continued to be the same way as they were in the previous months. The foreign countries showed vivid interest to Georgia, though such tendency was hindered by the fact of existence of the Soviet Union.

One of the first document in which Z. Gamsakhurdia spelled out his views on the issues of the foreign policy as a program, was his political platform for elections, as of the presidential candidate. Naturally, the first and the most serious goal was recognition of

Georgia as independent country. According the “Program,” this task included three paragraphs implying three goals:

1. Georgia to be recognized as independent country and consequently, its status as a sovereign state restored; 2. Restore and broaden Georgia’s diplomatic and consular relations with the foreign countries; 3. Georgia becoming the member state of the United Nations Organization and other international organizations playing full role in their activities. The special attention in the “Program” was paid to the necessity of establishing the economical ties with the European countries first of all. Though such possibilities were limited, the permanent missions of the Chamber of trade of Georgia in Austria, Morocco, Turkey, Israel, and USA were doing this work.

Hope was expressed in this document about the possibility that the visits of the Georgian government representatives to the USA, France, Austria, Italy, Turkey and Spain could make the “preparatory phase” which would be followed by establishing the Georgian diplomatic missions in the countries and establishing the centers of those countries in Georgia.

Inclusion in the international projects and establishing ties with several foreign countries aimed to break international isolation. In June 1991 the President of Georgia sent the address to the Heads of the countries interested in solving the problems of the Black Sea. Georgian president offered them cooperation and besides, his own initiative, concerning establishing a special intergovernmental protective organization working on the problems of the Black Sea ecology. The former soviet republic offered the interested countries respective conditions for work on this problem, taking an active role in settling the headquarters of the organization in Georgia. This was very interesting and useful offer which supposedly could awake real interest among the interested counties.

Georgian government showed increased interest in foreign politics. They were trying to get the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs more intensive and productive. In August 1991 the club of the specialists of the international relations was established at the Foreign Ministry. It was not a non-governmental organization; it was an official organization on a cost accounting basis, with the legal body status. The experts of the field would serve the Foreign Ministry and fulfill the advisor functions. As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia would be supplied by appropriate information, competent analysis and recommendations.

Naturally, the large-scale international forums were closed for non-recognized independent State, but there were some small exceptions. June 21-23, 1991, in the town Crans- Montana the International inter-government forum was held with participation of the government representatives of the European countries and the USSR. This forum was interesting because of the fact that government members of some “disobedient” countries, among them Georgia,

were also invited. The head of the government and the foreign minister of Georgia attended the forum.

The visit of the governmental delegation of Georgia to Strasburg, by invitation of the European Parliament, was the most important event at that time. The delegation was headed by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Tengiz Sigua. Within the visit frames, the delegation was hosted by the President of the European Parliament Enrique Baron Crespo. He and other high ranking officials got familiar with the social-political situation in Georgia and the Europeans got good impressions from the talk. They expressed the will to support and assist. The most important was that in the situation where the press and other means of information of the USSR, spread false information about Georgia and the European politicians expressed their will to come to Georgia and get familiar with the situation.(5)

In the period of April-august 1991, friendly relationships were established between Georgia and some countries on different levels. Turkey showed special interest to its neighbor country. On May 2, 1991, the representatives of Turkey and Georgia had a meeting in Moscow. The parties were introduced to each other by the counselor of the Turkish ambassador in the Soviet Union, Halil Akinji and the counselor of the Georgian ministry of foreign affairs Victor Chikaidze. The meeting was held at the Turkish embassy as the meeting was initiated by Turkey. Diverse subject were discussed at the meeting. As Moscow was spreading false information about Georgia, Turkish representatives expressed the wish to have the information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia directly to Ankara, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. Turkish representatives showed desire also for Georgia somehow to participate in the activities of the Black Sea Economic Union. The Turkish advisor expressed his deep concern for the unstable situation in Georgia that interfered in the process of Georgia's recognition. The advisor meant hard situations in Abkhazia and Shida Kartli region (so called South Ossetia). Turkish representative was anxious about the fact that according the information available for him, Georgian tourists coming to Turkey often appeal to the population of Georgian origin to unite with the historical homeland. He mentioned also that on some map printed in Georgia the part of the Turkish territory was marked as part of Georgia, and so on. The issues of the so called Turkish Meskhetians and the perspective of returning those people to Georgia were also discussed at this meeting. It could be concluded from this meeting that the Turkish representatives tried to set preconditions for normalized relations between Turkey and Georgia. Generally speaking, the aim of this meeting was to prepare another, larger meeting - the visit of the Turkish ambassador to Georgia. The ambassador expressed the wish to settle direct contacts with Georgia.(3)

Two weeks later, on May 15-16 the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Turkey to the USSR, Volkan Vural met with all the high rank officials of Georgia. Unfortunately, there is no information reserved in the archive documents about that visit. Supposedly, the talks mainly dealt with economical-cultural relations and the issues mentioned above.

Besides that, the parties concerned the possibility of opening Georgian Consulate in Turkey.(9)

The relations with Turkey, as the neighbor country became more intensive. On May 24, the Head of the government of Georgia, Tengiz Sigua met with the delegation from Turkey, city of Artvin. The head of the delegation, the Governor of the city, Aslan Eldimir was Georgian by origin. The members of the delegation were the representatives of the business sphere. The talks were going about tourism development, road building along the Black Sea cost, mutual export and import capabilities and others.

Germany was among those countries which refrained from having the direct ties with “disobedient” republics, especially with Georgia, though there were some individual instances of the economical relations which continued even after Georgia had gained the independence. For example, in April of that year, Guttman – the head of one of the German agricultural firms, paid his visit and had negotiations with high rank officials on agricultural and stock-raising issues. Namely in the sphere of technologies these issues implied providing population with the agricultural products. The negotiations had serious results. The agreement involved the visit of the Georgian ministers of the corresponding branches to Germany and meetings with German colleagues, on order to sign the agreements.

The visit of the Canadian delegation was similar to the German one. This delegation was headed by Horst Schmidt, the minister of tourism and foreign trade of the Alberta state of Canada. The negotiations concerned the perspectives of tourism development in Georgia; for this aim, Canadians suggested their help in preparing proper material-technical base, modern communications, and also modern technologies to provide help in producing oil.

Some more countries can be named which had some relations with non-recognized republic of Georgia. At the end of June 1991, the trade mission of Georgia was opened in Tel-Aviv. The presentation took place in the hotel “Charlton.” The head of the trade and business chamber of Georgia, Guram Akhvlediani and other members of delegation participated in this presentation. Director General of the federation of trade and industry chambers of Israel, Tsvi Amir attended the meeting. Establishing such structure aimed to settle and further develop the direct trade and economical relations between Georgia and Israel. Here could also be noted that previously to that fact, Georgia had opened the similar representative office in Morocco

The interest of the Western and generally foreign countries to the processes going on in Georgia was growing whenever some momentous event was taking place. One of such events was the multi-party elections in Georgia, in October 1990; then the referendum on March 31, 1991 and especially – declaration of Georgia’s independence on April 9, 1991. The fact of restoring its independence by Georgia was praised highly by the leader Western country – the USA. The State Department expressed their wish about peaceful and democratic settling of the problems emerged between Russia and Georgia.

It is known that during the period of elections of 1991, ex-president of the USA, Richard Nixon visited Georgia. His visit added more importance to the results of the elections especially at that time, after declaring independence by Georgia and increased the interest to this country. The sitting president of the USA, George Bush-junior met with Richard Nixon. Nixon spoke in details about his visit in the USSR and in Georgia. Then Washington Post published the article by the famous analyst Dmitri Simes. This article showed clearly, that in Nixon's opinion, the processes taking place in the USSR were chaotic. According this article, President Nixon met with "a man of strong will" Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Simes emphasized that the president of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev "again opposed the President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia." President Nixon supposed that "Gamsakhurdia guessed and recognized the wisdom of gradual approach." President Nixon meant the transition period of 2-3 years about which Georgian government had announced and after which independence of the country would become the reality. But that project failed.(10)

As early as before declaring independence, President Gamsakhurdia clearly expressed his view of pro-western orientation, at the press-conference. He sent a telegram to President George Bush, senior. In this telegram he wrote about Russia's aggression in so called South Ossetia. When a correspondent asked him about that telegram, President Gamsakhurdia answered: "We have good news. I have telegraphed Mr. Bush, warning that there were some signs of armed forces intervention in Georgian territory being prepared, as they are rudely interfering in our domestic affairs. And there are signs of reaction to this telegram, judging from the declaration of the State Department. Western world is our only hope. Only democracy can defend us."(7)

Then Gamsakhurdia explained his position more clearly: recognition of the defence of Georgia's independence depended from one hand on Kremlin – would it reconcile with this or not and on the other hand – on support of the West. If the Western countries pay more attention to Georgia as it was done by the State Department of the USA, then "there could be more guarantees for us to get full independence and withdrawal of Russian occupation forces"

After the visit of the President Nixon to Georgia, especially after the referendum of March 31, and declaration of restoration of independence on April 9, growing interest from the USA towards the processes in Georgia became obvious. An example of this was the 94<sup>th</sup> resolution of the first session of the US Congress adopted on April 9, 1991, i.e. just the same day of declaration of restoring the independence of Georgia.

This is the citation from the resolution text, which reflects the content of the resolution and the existed circumstances: "The resolution is dedicated to the second anniversary of the punitive operation in Georgia, Tbilisi, conducted by the Soviet armed forces units on April 9, 1989 and it demands from the Soviet Union to recognize the will of the Georgian people and confirm the legitimacy of the referendum of March 1991. Mr. Hales delivered the

resolution to the Senate and it was handed to Foreign affairs commission.” Then, on April 24, the full text of the resolution was published in the “Republic of Georgia”:

“We dedicate this resolution to the second anniversary of the punitive operation by the Soviet armed forces in Tbilisi, Georgia, and we demand from the Soviet Union to recognize the will of the Georgian people and confirm the legitimacy of the Referendum held in Georgia on March 31, 1991.

Proceeding from the fact that on April 9, 1989 the soldiers of the Soviet Red Army rudely attacked unarmed and peaceful demonstrate on the Lenin Square (now the Freedom Square) in Tbilisi, they used rockets, also sharpened sapper spades and toxic gas. Twenty people were killed, hundreds injured.

Proceeding from the fact that despite the attempts from the Soviet leaders side to suppress evidences, the world got information and some humanitarian leaders such as Mother Theresa, also the group of West Germany medics specialized on such matters, arrived to Tbilisi to render support to injured people.

Proceeding from the fact that the brutality of the Soviet Army on April 9 in Georgia resulted in changing the political forces balance in Georgia and finally, on October 28, 1990 the communist governing in Georgia ended as the result of the elections.

Proceeding from the fact that Georgia refused to participate in the referendum on March 17, held by the Central Soviet Government and in reply decided to hold referendum in Ggeorgia, on March 31, 1991, in which the 98,9% of the participants voted for restoration of the national independence which once again confirmed that the Georgian nation is one of the oldest, unique and individual nation which has its old history beginning from the era of the Christ’s birth

Proceeding from the fact that today is the day of the second anniversary of the April 9 tragic day in Tbilisi, we conclude that the Senate:

1. Confirms support to Georgian people in reaching their will to restore their national and territorial independence through peaceful demonstrations.
2. Confirms support to the request of Georgian people concerning national self-determination by reference to the final act signed at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to which the USSR is also a member.
3. Confirms support to Georgian people’s wish to benefit from the human rights which the God’s gift.
4. Expresses respect to the victims of the people’s demonstration in Tbilisi, on April 9, 1989, as they were the peaceful protestors and died for freedom and independence.
5. And we demand from the Soviet Government to acknowledge the will of the Georgian people and to recognize the legitimacy of the referendum of March 31, 1991 (6)

On May 16, the delegation of the representatives of the political and business circles of the USA arrived to Georgia. During the meeting with Zviad Gamsakhurdia, among other issues, the talk concerned the necessity of opening the mission of Georgia in Washington. The mission would promote rendering objective information about the processes going on in Georgia. It was mentioned that in the nearest future the Institute of Georgia would be open in Washington and would carry the work of the Mission of Georgia. This information was given to the participants of the talks by Merab Uridia. After being elected the President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia spread some reassuring information. One of them concerned his probable meeting with the president of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev. Gamsakhurdia announced at the conference, that on May 20 he received the message from the Government of the USSR in which Gorbachev asked him to arrive to Moscow on May 24, but he failed to turn up in time. Then Gamsakhurdia added that in his opinion there were some forces which interfered in this case because the press centre of Gorbachev then announced that there never was any talk about such meeting

The second information was more interesting. At the press conference the same year, at the end of May, Z. Gamsakhurdia announced that he was in the process of preparing his visit to the USA was being preparing “I am now setting contacts and preparing my meetings with the President Bush, first of all. The date of the meeting will soon settle.”(8)

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, in his interview to the editor of the Turkish newspaper “Turkey,” Bilal Qochak, Zviad Gamsakhurdia repeated his statement about the probable visit to the USA. “Just now the talks about my visit and talk with the President George Bush are going on; so the position of the American administration about our issue will clear. To my mind the attitude of the American congress is very friendly, they often concern our theme. We are waiting for the visit of the American congressmen visit to us soon”

Some short time later more serious step was made towards American-Georgian interrelations. In the middle of June the Minister of the Foreign Affairs of Georgia Giorgi Khoshtaria visited the USA. At his return he said that the only goal for which he visited America was to prepare meeting of President Gamsakhurdia with President Bush. The details of this visit were not talked about but everybody was sure that the visit became real to happen. Such precedent took place later in 1991, when the President of Armenia Ter-Petrosian visited America. On the same days the new President of Russia Boris Eltsin also visited the country, on June 18-21, 1991.

While waiting for the visit to the USA, Zviad Gamsakhurdia sent the letter of congratulation to President Bush, on the Day of Independence. He expressed his hope in the letter that with the support of the United States of America and personally president George Bush, Georgia could reach real Independence.



Factually, the Senate's document confirmed the increased interest towards Georgia and its independence. This very important document was published in American press: "The members of the Senate of America congratulate the people of the republic of Georgia and the Parliament on the occasion that on April 9, 1991, the majority of people voted univocally to their independence from the USSR. We conclude that the copy of the given Resolution will be sent to President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.(4)

At the beginning of July, 1991 there still were some expectations about the visit of the President of Georgia to the USA. There were positive messages again coming from America. In his interview of the July 3, 1998, President Gamsakhurdia said that he received the letter from five senators: Wilson, Mitchell and others, announcing that they recognize the Independence of Georgia. Gamsakhurdia announced that they were waiting for the visit of American delegation with 35 congressmen leading by De Consilar, who was the head of the "Helsinki group" existing at the Congress.

In August the same year, Georgia again was waiting for the governmental delegation to visit the USA and the optimistic views about the relations with this country existed. At the end of July, during the visit of the President Bush to the USSR, President Bush and President Gorbachev signed the agreement about reduction of strategic armament by 30 per cent. Besides that, President Bush agreed with the wish of President Gorbachev about signing the new treaty on alliance by the republics. When in Kiev, President Bush appealed to Ukrainian people to sign the new treaty. This news was received negatively in Georgia but there was no official comment on it.

But from this very moment the relations between the high officials of Georgia and the USA began going worse. The President of America George Bush, senior, in fact categorized the Soviet Republics into two groups. He positively praised the republics which showed respect to the democratic values, protected the rights of the national minorities. President typed those republics, which he thought followed the course of nationalism as the second group. He referred Ukraine, Russia, Armenia and Baltic Republics to the first group. He did not name Georgia as the republic belonging to either of those groups but he alluded that in the second group he meant those republics which were "struggling for independence trying to replace imposed tyranny by local despotism." And supposedly, he meant Georgia here.

Despite the above mentioned, at the beginning of August the issue of the probable visit of Georgia's President to the USA was still actual, as it is seen from the existing official information. At the beginning of August the M of Georgia, Giorgi Khoshtaria met with the press-secretary of the White House, M. Fitzwater. "During our talk the positive attitude towards the future visit of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia to the USA was obvious." This information was spread by the press-office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

At last, the long talks ended positively. The congressman Dana Rohrabacher arrived to Georgia on August 7. He delivered the official invitation of the Congress to the President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. This surely was very important fact. Of course, if Zviad Gamsakhurdia had received the invitation from the President Bush himself, this invitation would have been of higher level and higher status but at this starting stage, invitation of the president of non-recognized country to the USA was important and revealed America's support to Georgia.

Inviting the president of the "disobedient" country was an open warning to official Moscow. Thus, official Washington made an important step towards supporting Georgia.

This reassuring information was published on August 8. One day later the event took place which gave absolutely opposite direction to the next political events and the foreign policy course of Georgia. The opponents anyway accused President Gamsakhurdia and his administration for not providing pro-western political course properly. Primarily, those accusations were not quite justified but the Government information issued on August 9 was of the different character. In fact, this informative declaration of the Georgian government blamed the political course of the West in general and its leader country, towards the former Soviet Republics, struggling for their independence.

We agree with the view expressed in Georgian historiography which says that till the August of 1991, President Gamsakhurdia did not pursue the policy of isolation. Isolation policy towards Georgia started first from the West. „Isolation of Georgia was conditioned by much more serious international and geopolitical factors, than such minor causes as for example, a political image of President Gamsakhurdia or the anti-West attitudes of some less important people in his Government.”(2)

We share the opinion that the interests of the so-called "disobedient" republics became a victim to the treaty between the USA and USSR on reducing the strategic armament. It was normal, but the government of Georgia expressed their discontent in tough wording and even took the anti-western position in the "governmental declaration". This was a rude mistake of Gamsakhurdia's government even though it was not made by name of the President of Georgia or his administration

The Government of Georgia strongly criticized "position of the Western governmental senior circles, namely, those of the USA" for their supporting position about maintaining the USSR as the united state. „The visit of Mr. George Bush to Moscow and Kiev was above the worst expectations. The President of America – successor of the presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and others, arrives to the Russian Empire and agitates for the all-union treaty, calls for all the former republics to voluntarily put their heads into the loop of the Empire, sign the treaty of slavery and deny their freedom.” “Mr. Bush calls the struggle for Freedom “the evidences of nationalism” – was said further in the governmental declaration – “and this contradicts to the Helsinki Act principles.” The declaration ended

with these words: “We wish the President and Government of the USA supported not tyranny, communism and false reforms, but the true democracy, freedom and independence of all nations. Only this is the way by which America could stay faithful to its historic mission.”(1)

This “declaration of the Georgian Government” cannot be justified and speaking lightly, it was a big mistake. A small republic, struggling its way to independence, opposing the USSR, through that declaration was opposing with its own ally –the Western World and the leader country of this world – the USA. Thus, the government of Georgia put its country in an unfavorable position and that was its dead-end policy which unintentionally caused international isolation of the country.

Concluding from our research work we can say that Zviad Gamsakhurdia Government was trying to obtain new political ties to recognize Georgia as the new Independent Republic. We have searched out that in that period Georgia had interrelations with the countries we can be divided into three groups:

1. Former or existed Soviet Republics.
2. Former Eastern Europe Socialist countries.
3. The states of the West Europe and Commonwealth countries.

The full scale interrelations were established only with the countries of the first group; The absolute majority of the states of the Commonwealth refrained from acknowledging the independence of Georgia and from having the full scale political and diplomatic relations with the country. The relations of Georgia with those countries were only partial, having the economical and cultural character.

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