

The processes taking place in the USA and Republic of Georgia (October-March, 1990-1991)

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Abstract

The represented work aims to determine the character of attitude of the USA Government and official circles towards the authorities of newly declared Republic of Georgia. The countries of the Western World which recognized the USSR, avoided settling the relations with newly declared former Soviet Republics and especially Georgia among others.

Despite this fact the leader state of the West – the USA tried to show their interest in indirect ways towards the national and democratic processes taking place in Georgia. The USA Government greeted the multi-partial elections which brought the communist era to the end.

The so called “parallel tactics” announced by the USA was an important initiative in that period of time. It was an important fact that on the day when Referendum was taking place in Georgia the results of which showed that great majority of the population voted for the Independence, ex-president Richard Nixon visited Tbilisi. In its turn, the new government of Georgia was trying to express their support to the USA and other democratic countries of the world in their actions against Iraq.

Key words: *democracy, independence, west, USA, USSR*

As a result of the multi-party elections carried out in Georgia, October 28, 1990, the communist party dictatorship came to its end. The new national government declared Georgia Independent Republic of Georgia. The administration of Zviad Gamsakhurdia was trying to set diplomatic interrelations with the United States of America. Our work aims to research the facts and the character of those diplomatic ties in the period between the end of the year 1990 and March 1991. 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).

The new government of Georgia was trying to express their attitude, as the State, towards the most important historical events all over the world. In those days the main events of such kind were unfolding in the Middle East. The Government of the Republic of Georgia rightly thought that in this way Georgia could announce its political course and orientation in general, thus preparing the ground for political ties with the Western world.

In August 1990, Kuwait underwent occupation and annexation by Iraq military forces. The head of the Kuwait government, Sheikh Jabar escaped to Saudi Arabia. The marionette government of Hussein Ali came to power and Kuwait was announced the Republic. Soon it was annexed by Iraq and announced its 19th province.

The Western Powers sharply reacted to the Iraq ambitions. The Security Council of the United Nations adopted the resolution and appealed to Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait. The USA, France and Great Britain froze Iraq’s financial assets. George Bush (senior) made a decision to send his troops to the Middle East. The situation of being at the wedge of the full scale war emerged in the Middle East. In such circumstances, the new government of Georgia decided to declare their position. On

December 10, 1990, the Address was sent “to the UN, to the parliaments of the States worldwide, and to other international organizations” on behalf of the media centre of the Supreme Council of Georgia. In this address Georgia univocally blamed Kuwait’s occupation by Iraq and declared solidarity to the “oppressed small nation.” In the Address, Georgian government tried to underline similarities in the situations of Kuwait and Georgia. It was pointed in the document that the only difference between these two countries laid in the fact that Kuwait had undergone occupation only some four months earlier and Georgia had been occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union during 70 years up to then and it was under the real threat of losing its territories even at that time. In the end, this declaration expressed great hope that “the whole civilized world” would support “all nations being under similar circumstances as Kuwait, due to the historical injustices of the Last Empire.” Surely, the Soviet Union was meant in the term “last empire,” but this was not announced due to the diplomatic ethics.(1).

This document was notable. The government of Georgia tried to start foreign policy as an independent political body. Simultaneously, the new government assumed that it sees its positions alongside with the Western countries, first of all, the USA. There existed also the third factor – Georgian government did not oppose the Soviet Union either. The Soviet Union also blamed occupation of Kuwait and Iraq’s aggression. Thus, that was the international context at that time.

Generally, Zviad Gamsakhurdia supposed that if the conflict took place in the Middle East it would initiate rapprochement process between the USSR and the Western Powers. This could result in forcing the Soviet Union central government to weaken suppress on the former republics, namely on Georgia. Besides all, this could become possible because of imminent rapprochement of the positions between the USA and the Soviet Union as a result of the mentioned conflict. The two powers could really find common interests: disarmament, stopping nuclear weapon racing and other global issues. Such problems needed shared interests and decisions of the Great Powers of the World. The new leader of Georgia was right in the general setting of the issue and in viewing the way of its solving.

It is well-known that the United Nations adopted the resolution №678. This resolution obliged Iraq to withdraw the troops from Kuwait. Saddam Hussein’s administration did not abide the resolution. On January 17, 1991 the coalition forces of the USA and its allies invaded Kuwait aiming to expel Iraq troops from the territory. They started military actions to free this country. Military troops of about 40 countries participated in the military operation. Some countries participated in the actions only symbolically, for

example, Denmark and Greece were represented only with one frigate each but such symbolic participation underlined the fact that many countries from all over the world united and countered against invasion of a small country by a large and strong country. In such situation the national government of Georgia expressed solidarity to the USA, its allies and “the whole world society”. On January 17, 1991 the Foreign Ministry of Georgia circulated an address deploring that Iraq government did not implement the resolution of the United Nations and “the whole world’s society now has nothing to do but to use force and on this ground, the republic of Georgia, its Foreign Ministry “fully supports the military actions of the allied forces in Persian Gulf.”

The address highlighted the fact that military actions were used to restore justice. Those actions were directed against “trampling the legitimate rights of people” and thus, they stood with “the interests of all the civilized nations, whole international society struggling to establish new world order.” Thus, Georgia clearly and univocally announced its position in line with the “world community”.

This address was sent to the Secretary General of the UN Peres de Cuellar; to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR; to the embassies of the USA, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, France, Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Consulate of Israel. The leader state of the Western world, the USA had earlier responded to the multi-party elections in Georgia on a expedited basis, expressing their attitude to this event. Their position sounded through the radio station “The Voice of America.” The editor’s letter was titled „The American Government’s View of Georgia”. This all happened in November 10, 1990.

The USA greeted the elections in Georgia, which were the first multi-party elections in the country after 1920-ies. The US Government especially supported the statement of Zviad Gamsakhurdia about the two-year transition period after which Georgia would be able to withdraw from the Soviet Union. American Government especially underlined the thesis about “peaceful withdrawal of the former Soviet Republics through peaceful dialogue and democratic processes.” The State Secretary James baker hoped that the processes taking place in the Soviet Union, leading to the changes of the “political system and economic decentralization could overcome possible chaos and collapse.” Despite the fact that in Georgia the official position of the American government could seem as muted response it had to be taken into consideration by the new Georgian government. Georgian media, namely newspaper “The opinion” wrote that the elections took place in the Soviet Georgia and this was a progress on “the way to democratization of the processes in the Soviet Union.” The US government greeted Georgia’s striving to independence but they noted that this was only the wish and the goal of the party which won the elections – “the

Round Table”. Thus, the American government sent messages in two directions: on one hand they called upon the central government to avoid chaos and on the other they advised the Soviet republics not to hurry yet, thus the position of Georgia which declared the two year transition period suited the American scenario.(2)

As we have noted above, the leaders of the Western Powers did not make any comment about new government having come to Georgia or maybe, they refrained from doing so in order not to irritate Moscow. But it is hard to imagine that they did not ever give any assessment to the processes. During the briefing held on December 14, 1990, the official representative of the State Department of the USA, M. Tathwhyler was asked by a correspondent about annulment of the autonomic region status for South Ossetia, the Department representative, according the media (“Republic of Georgia”), answered: “our position used to be that we recognized integrity of the USSR within the borders designated in 1917, or maybe in 1922 or 1927 – I don’t remember it now, but our position is that we recognize their sovereign territorial integrity...” The mentioned newspaper incorrectly commented on this position and criticized the representative of the State Department for not knowing that the USA recognized the Soviet Union only in 1933. „We suppose it is a pity that Washington’s position is not to express their official position towards the processes taking place in the Republics of the Soviet Union, in such form that could somehow cast and weaken President Gorbachov’s position.”(7).

Unfortunately, such was the reality. Anyway, the State Department of the US fixed the position of the government and sent a message to the new government of Georgia that as far as the US recognized territorial integrity of the USSR, they would not interfere the inner affairs, would not support Georgia’s strive to reach full independence from Moscow. It was interesting what would be the answer from Georgia’s government and what policy would they choose towards the political course of the US. Would their course remain the same as it was when the political association “Round Table-Free Georgia” began their political way participating in the elections? Their ideological platform implied not to interfere and not to be the point of crossing their interests. At that moment, the new government of Georgia was adequately estimating the interrelations with the West. In December 1990, Zviad Gamsakhurdia announced the political view of the Government and himself: there is the discussion going on in the Western world about the position towards the Soviet republics, first of all, this can be said in relation with the leader country of the West – the USA. The opposition of that country blames their president for taking the side of the “oppressor” – the government of the USSR. That was the position of moral character but as for the official position of the USA, it was pragmatic. From the

above mentioned, Gamsakhurdia concluded: “if that moment of moral position which dominated in the times of President Ronald Reagan, wins in the politics of the USA and the Western World, then it would become possible that the balance weigh down in our benefit; for the time now there is no sign of it.”(5).

The USA position to Georgia and other Soviet republics was distinct. At that time other republics could not even about direct official relations with the US. The perspective was unreal. But nevertheless some weak countries had to begin those relations. And Georgia made its first steps. In the second half of the February of the year 1991, official delegation of Georgia visited United States of America. The members of the delegation were: the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia Akaki Asatiani, the head of the Parliament’s commission of foreign affairs Tedo Paataashvili, his deputy Merab Uridia and academician Tamaz Gamkrelidze. The officials of the US government did not meet the delegation at the airport. Thus this visit could not be assumed as official, though the members of the delegation all were high rank officials. Only the members of the Georgian society and jewish society of Georgian origin met them at the airport. But as the head of the delegation, Akaki Asatiani said, the visit aimed to settle friendship contacts and he hoped that this could be achieved on higher level. Similar declaration was made by Tedo Paataashvili adding that it was desirable to set the ties in the sphere of economics too as far as it was possible.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia was not so optimistic. With his team, he accessed the situation adequately. During the press-conference, when a representative of one of the information agencies, Vakhtang Bakhtadze asked him what results he expected from the visit, Gamsakhurdia answered that they had not received any important information so far. “Our delegation may have an audience with the vice president Dan Quayle but we are not sure about it. The situation is precarious because of the Iraq war.” (9).

Despite such situation the delegation continued their visit. They wanted to know what steps the US government was going to take for supporting Georgia and when it could be possible. During the press-conference in Georgia, held on March 9, Gamsakhurdia was asked about the results of delegation which was still in the US. Gamsakhurdia answered that the delegation had not met the representatives of the White house yet, but they met the representatives of the congress, had a meeting with the president Reagan, other officials. “They all are friendly to us and as for official declaration of support, this has not been declared yet even to the Baltic States” – replied Gamsakhurdia. He supposed it was possible that a delegation of American congressmen and other officials could visit Georgia.

On March 16 the President summed the visit up though the delegation did not get any clear answer from the first rank officials of the US government. Finally, the work of the delegation was summed up as the first step on the way towards closer relations with America. The visit cannot be called futile. First time contacts were settled on the way to closer ties between Georgian government and Senate and Congress of the USA. It was important. One more important step was made by the US government not namely towards Georgia support but generally to relations with all the Soviet republics. This step was noted by the Georgian delegation and they mentioned it as they returned to the country. This importance was expressed in the decision of the US government to settle “parallel interrelations” which implied establishing cooperative relations with the Centre and with the republics as well. This was an important fact. Despite the careful position of the US government towards the so called disobedient republics, they still expressed their loyalty though in a composed manner. In the middle of March, when visiting the Soviet Union, the State Secretary James Baker met with the representatives of the Soviet republics in Moscow, in the US embassy. John Methlock, the ambassador, hosted this meeting. Among other representatives, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the country attended the meeting.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia delivered a ten-minute speech in which he mentioned that there were no reforms at all carried out in the USSR, and instead, turning back to totalitarianism was expected which was clear when observing the repressions taken against the rebelled republics. The Centre in Moscow was trying to create a new federation of the States which would again be subjugated to Moscow and called “federation of the Sovereign States”. Gamsakhurdia underlined that the position of the West was the most important – as the Western Powers did not believe the claims of Saddam Hussein about forming Kuwait as an independent state, just the same approach would be used to Gorbachov’s claims about formation the new independent states which soon would unite in the so called “Federation of the Sovereign States.”

Thus the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Georgia accented the designation of the USA which was expected: “to help to free the subjugated countries and to aid to their freedom just as the USA helped to free Kuwait.” Gamsakhurdia explained plainly and clearly what should have been the role of the US and other Western Powers towards the Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia noted, among other things, that in the same hall, on May 29 of 1988, he met President Reagan at the meeting of the similar character and he then heard there the guarantees that “sooner or later, the nations, annexed by the Soviet Union will become free and the USA’s role in this historical event will be great.”

The media reported that James Baker listened to the speech of Gamsakhurdia “silently and did not make any controversial remark.” That could only mean that he principally agreed with Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s arguments but the reality demanded from him to be diplomatically flexible and to take into consideration that the Soviet Union still existed at that time. The State Secretary did not say a word about this but he diplomatically noted that still and all the reforms had already taken place in the USSR otherwise such meeting could never take place. Besides, the Secretary of State asked a question to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, through which he gave a cue that the processes would go on in direction of democratization of the Soviet Union. For example, it could be really a great reform if they could reach consent on exploring and developing the law of quitting the Soviet Union by the republics. Zviad Gamsakhurdia and other participants of the meeting agreed to this scenario. Thus the Secretary of State hinted that the USA could not act in the same way against the Soviet Union as they acted in the case of Kuwait, starting the war against Iraq.

It should be noted that there was a short personal talk between Baker and Gamsakhurdia after the official meeting. The newspaper “Republic of Georgia” (March 19, 1990) wrote that the Secretary of State expressed his great interest to Georgia: “I am fascinated by Georgia, though I have never been to your country: - said he. Surely, this meeting and short talk between Gamsakhurdia and Baker represented the most important episode in the American-Georgian relations, taking into consideration the circumstances of those times. Georgian government could make useful conclusions. It was obvious out of James Baker’s talk that the USA will not support the Soviet republics in their open struggle, except the Baltic States. At that time it was how the international conjuncture stood.

Nevertheless, the important progress was obvious. In the same period, during Baker’s visit in Moscow, the “parallel approach” tactics was developed towards the Soviet Republics. It was decided to study the situation in Georgia and observe the referendum process. Senator Robert Dowly and Congressman Dana Rohrabacher initiated this course. They introduced draft project to the congress. This draft implied financial support to those republics of the USSR and Yugoslavia which were on the way to implement the democratic reforms.

Some time passed and as the referendum on the independence of Georgia (31 March, 1991) was approaching, attention from the West towards the country increased. From this viewpoint, the visit of the US former president Richard Nixon held on 30-31 March, was an especially important episode for the Georgian-American relations. This visit was not official but it confirmed increasing interest of the West towards the processes taking place

in Georgia. The visit implied that America supported the position of Georgia implied in this referendum. When meeting with Zviad Gamsakhurdia, President Richard Nixon noted that he arrived under the instruction of the President George Bush.

Other Western Powers also got interested in Georgia's referendum of the 31 of March. Some days earlier to it the Sweden Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Carl Otto Erjan Berner and his wife arrived to Georgia.(3)

The date of the visit and the situation showed that Sweden tried to support the processes taking place in Georgia. Moscow could not interfere in these processes and in referendum particularly. It was impossible to interdict in the voyage of the Sweden Ambassador as he and his wife were travelling within still the Soviet territory, to one of "its republics". But it was clear that Sweden sympathized to the "disobedient" republic and to the process of disintegration of the USSR.

The press conference on the results of the referendum about restoring the independence of Georgia was held on April 1, in the hotel "Metekhi," in Tbilisi. At this press conference the deputy head of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia Akaki Asatiani, head of the election commission Archil Chirakadze and his deputy Vakhtang Khmaladze met mass media representatives from almost all over the world including Georgia itself and the USSR.

Akaki Asatiani held a speech. He noted that Georgia made an important step towards its independence and if any military intervention did not take place nothing would be able to interrupt people's will. Asatiani cited President Richard Nixon who was in Tbilisi on the referendum day: "They can occupy your land but they cannot tame your spirit. I hope, I will live till I come Georgia again and to see it as free and independent country."(8).

Citing those words Asatiani in such way showed opposition between the the strongest country of the Western democracy and metropolitan Soviet Union.

The foreign mass media published first news about the independence referendum in Georgia. According the television company ABC 3 million people participated in the referendum and 80% of them voted for the independence. Washington Post announced the same number. The ABC emphasized that the referendum did not refer only to being independent but it also implied stopping the system under leadership of the communist party. French television commented that it was clear even earlier that most of the participants in referendum would vote for independence and quitting the Soviet Union.(10).

Observers were invited to attend the 31 March referendum from the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Poland, Hungary, from the cities Moscow and Leningrad. As confirmation of their solidarity and support, the deputy to the Supreme Soviet of Estonia and its Human Rights League President, Ants Pine, also the Belgian professor and lawyer Andre Serve planted silver spruce trees in the garden of the Tbilisi youth palace garden.

During the same days, the Head of the Supreme Council of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia met with the British Ambassador Bright. It was an unofficial meeting. Gamsakhurdia represented the provisional results of the referendum. He told that support of the Great Britain was especially important for Georgia. On his part, the guest noted that it was the position of his country to support all the people in the world in their struggle for freedom and independence within the norms of the international justice. The ambassador underlined also the fact that all the Western World is somehow misinformed about the processes taking place in Georgia. It was necessary to break information blockade discussing this problem on the governmental level. As we noted earlier, in the historiography preface of our work, we do not deal in details with the relations between Georgia and the Soviet Union of that time. We consider that relations with Russia which then still represented a true metropolia, played the most decisive role for Georgia. That's why we always underlined the need to study Russia-Georgian relations as a separate issue and we deliberately avoided discussing the relations with Russia and decided to make relations with other foreign countries. Almost nobody has so far addressed in any monograph study to this issue.

But such situation did not exclude concerning occasional ties between Georgia and the Soviet Union (then with Russia), in our research work, as a topical question. The Soviet Union showed special irritation signs when Georgia was attempting to communicate with influential Western Powers and have economical and political ties with them. One of such attempts took place when the delegation of the Georgian Government visited Italy. This visit was not covered by press. The interesting fact was that members of the Georgian delegation got some intoxication and besides that, some unidentified individuals damaged one of the cars of the delegation. Zviad Gamsakhurdia commented on this fact. He reserved judgment about the fault of the USSR for no availability of facts but he said that Moscow propagandistic machine daily spread false information about Georgia in western countries and Soviet secret agents impeded all attempts from Georgian side to establish contacts with the western world.(6).

All visits which were conducted by the new government of Georgia during November-December of 1990 and at the beginning of 1991, bear more or less importance and aimed

to have closer ties with West, that could of course, bring the results. We will consider and assess those visits in the future but among them there were some which at this time we can only consider as strange exception. On December 6, 1990 the Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Republic of Mali to the Soviet Union, Abdulai Amadu Si with ambassadress, Madam Kh. D. Si. It was a short visit and the guests returned to Moscow on the next day. There was a talk between Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Ambassador the content of which was not discussed in the press, there are not any archive documents about it either. Maybe this was not of any importance. It can be concluded that the visit was planned earlier and implied visit in Georgia as one of the Soviet republics. Though the visit was held at the time when Georgia was striving to full independence, it cannot be considered as an episode of the official interrelations between Georgia and Republic of Mali.(4).

We conclude at the end of our research work that the national government headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia was trying to set diplomatic ties with the United States of America. Georgian government underlined its wish in some official documents related with the international activities of the USA (such as the military operations in Kuwait and others). In its turn, the American Government which at that time still recognized the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union restrained from the open diplomatic interrelations with Georgia. They were trying to express their interest and support to the Republic of Georgia in unofficial, informal ways.

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