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ARMENIAN ORGANISATIONS IN GEORGIA: CASE OF SAMTKHE-JAVAKHETI

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the Armenian organizations established in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia. Samtskhe-Javakheti region was chosen as the main subject of the study because it is the region where the largest Armenian minority in Georgia lives. In the study the main goals, tasks and objectives of the Armenian organizations in the region are discussed and the internal and external factors influencing the activities of these organizations are analyzed. In 1991, with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Georgia regained its independence. The collapse of the USSR led to a deep socio-political and economic crisis in Georgia, as well as difficulties in the process of nation-building. In addition, the civil war in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, which resulted from the separatist movements, was also a complicating factor. This study is based on qualitative research and were used secondary sources. In the process of research, sources such as studies, articles, reports, academic books, journal articles, internet sites materials of various research centres and institutes were used.

Keywords: Armenians, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia, separatism, unfounded claims

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, when the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Georgia restored independence. As a result of a referendum held on March 31, 1991, Georgia declared its independence on April 9, 1991. The collapse of the USSR led to a deep socio-political and economic crisis in Georgia, as well as difficulties in the process of nation-building. One of the factors complicating this process was the far-right politics of Georgia's first President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, which triggered the national sensitivities of the Georgian people. In addition, the civil war in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, which resulted in separatist movements, was a complicating factor.

After the restoration of independence in 1991, Georgia could be characterized as a very complex country in terms of inter-ethnic relations. Armenians, one of the minorities living in Georgia, took advantage of the difficult socio-political and economic situation in the country and established various organizations. These organizations exploited inter-ethnic relations and fomented separatism. Against the backdrop of continuing problems in the breakaway regions, Armenian organizations emerged as a potential separatist force. Founded with the aim of reviving the so-called Armenian language and culture, almost all of these organizations soon became a source of separatism and began to make territorial claims against Georgia. This led to the emergence of the Javakheti conflict in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, which became the "eternal problem".

Internal and external factors affecting the activities of these organizations are also discussed in the paper. The main objectives of the study are as follows: to identify the main political and socio-economic prerequisites for the formation of Armenian organizations in Samtskhe-Javakheti after the collapse of the USSR; to unpack the main directions of the activities of Armenian organizations; to identify the influence of external factors such as the Armenian Church and the Armenian state on these activities.



This study was conducted on the basis of qualitative research. In the research process, studies, articles, reports, academic books, journal articles, websites, materials of various research centers and institutes were used.

A review of the literature on the activities of Armenian organizations in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region in Georgia reveals that the issue has been the subject of many studies in the fields of history and sociology, as well as political studies with a legal emphasis. However, it has been observed that most of these studies do not address all aspects of the issue and are generally limited to a specific framework.

Various studies examine the activities of Armenian organizations in the context of Armenia-Georgia bilateral relations and focus on the factors influencing these relations. This approach is prominent in the works of authors such as Omarov [15] and Jabbarlı [5]. In his study, Habibbayli [7] investigated the regional strategies of Armenian organizations, especially their impact on relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Other scholars, on the other hand, consider the issue from a regional security perspective. This perspective is more linked to geopolitical relations in the region. The strengthening of Armenian nationalism in the Javakheti region has posed a significant threat. As noted in Cornell's [6] study, ethnic conflicts have been coupled with demands for autonomy in the South Caucasus, leading to an increase in separatist movements in the region.

Many Armenian researchers, on the other hand, have taken a biased stance. Namely, they argue that their studies have created a fear of assimilation among the Armenian population in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. This can be explained by the fact that these studies were conducted under the influence of Armenia's policy towards Georgia and ideological barriers. This makes it difficult to address the issue objectively. In addition, Western researchers Hin [8], Wheatley [31], etc. analyze the problem from the point of view of the defense of the rights of national minorities.

The review of the available literature revealed some gaps in the main topic of the article. Studies that independently analyze the factors affecting the activity of Armenian organizations are very limited. This article aims to fill this gap.

Armenian migration to Georgia

An analysis of the activities of Armenian organizations in Georgia reveals that the Samtskhe-Javakheti region is of special importance. Because this region is the main center of the activities of Armenian organizations. The cities of the region consist of Akhalkalaki, Akhalsykh, Adygen, Borjomi and Ninotsminda. "Due to the intervention of tsarist Russia in the XIX century and the deportation of the local population of Meskhetian Turks during the reign of Iosif Stalin, the Armenian population in the region has increased significantly" [17]. In accordance with the Treaty of Edirne, approximately 40,000 of the Armenians who migrated from Eastern Anatolia to the Caucasus were settled in Akhalkalaki in a planned manner. The reason for this decision can be explained as follows:

"In this context, the fact that Turks lived on the border line with Turkey was perceived as a threat by the Russian Tsardom and in order to balance this threat, some of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia were migrated and settled here. In the following period, the Turks in the region were deported at the first opportunity that arose and the Turkish threat on the border line was completely eliminated and a situation was created in favor of the Armenians, who were considered as a friendly element" [10].

Organizations founded by Armenians living with the dream of "Greater Armenia" and previously indoctrinated with Turkophobia became the main source of Armenian nationalism and terror in



the XIX Caucasus [13]. “At the beginning of the 20th century, the support of the Armenian Church influenced the expansion of the activities of Armenian organizations” [24, p. 52].

Armenian terrorist acts were based on territorial claims against various peoples, especially neighboring Azerbaijanis, Turks and Georgians. Their desire to establish their own state in their so-called “own land” was in reality based on extreme nationalism and separatist policies. In other words, “Armenian terrorism as part of international terrorism was well organized” [16].

According to Georgian historian Mosidze, the ethnic structure of Javakheti was negatively affected by the policies and practices pursued by the Soviet Union. Mosidze states that during the Soviet rule, people of Armenian nationality were brought to high positions, and many social, economic and cultural problems in the region were solved in line with the interests of the Armenian people. In this process, the Georgian population was ignored by both local and central authorities. “As a result of these policies, many Georgian villages were transformed into Armenian villages over time” [27].

“Since the Meskhetian Turks were deported by Stalin in 1944 and replaced by Georgians and Armenians, today about half of the population of the region is Armenians” [9, p. 68].

After Stalin's death in 1956, the repressive regime was lifted and the exiles were granted the right to return to their homeland. However, Meskhetian Turks have not been able to get any result from the struggle for their return that they started in 1956. In 1999, Georgia had to accept the return of Meskhetian Turks as a condition of becoming a member of the Council of Europe. On July 11, 2007, Georgia approved the law on repatriation, but this process has been hindered for different reasons. The main factor affecting the process is the Armenians in Georgia. Despite the fact that Meskhetian Turks have the right to return to the country with the decision taken by the Georgian parliament in 2007, there is no solution due to the opposition of the Armenian people and organizations in the region. The return of Meskhetian Turks to their homeland is prevented by Armenian organizations influential in the region.

Over time, Javakheti has become the region with the largest Armenian minority in Georgia. Armenians are the majority in two districts of Samtskhe-Javakheti - Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. More than 90 percent of the population of these towns is Armenian.

This historical background plays an important role in understanding contemporary ethnic tensions and the activities of Armenian organizations. This demographic change in Samtskhe-Javakheti has underpinned the political and social dynamics in the region and has been the basis of the never-ending Javakheti conflict for Georgia.

Armenian Organizations in Georgia

In 1991, the collapse of the USSR led to a deep political crisis in Georgia. The first President of Georgia was Zviad Gamsakhurdia, known for his nationalist views. His policy towards ethnic minorities living in Georgia was effective in activating Armenian nationalists. In such an environment, Armenian organisations started to take a more active part in political processes.

According to the researcher Cornell, Armenians showed a higher level of hostility towards the Georgian authorities than other ethnic groups. In the early 1990s, when the referendum on Georgian independence was held, “only 52 per cent of Armenians living in Akhalkalaki voted, whereas Azerbaijanis, the majority in Marneuli, voted with 86 per cent” [6, p. 163]. This shows that while Azerbaijanis support Georgia's independence, the Armenian community has a colder approach to this process.

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Ethnic tensions in Javakheti reached their peak in the first years of Georgia's independence and caused serious problems in the region. The situation was further complicated by the war in Abkhazia in the early 1990's. The fact that Armenians in Abkhazia supported the Abkhazians led to an increase in anti-Armenian sentiments in Georgia. Namely, it raised concerns that Russia, which supported not only separatism in Abkhazia, but also a similar movement in Tskhinvali, could provoke a similar conflict in the Javakheti region [8, p. 63]. During this period, Javakheti was often characterised as a "potential hot spot".

According to researcher Lom, the emergence of radical and nationalist organisations was due to the region's remoteness from the centre. Javakheti was socio-economically more dependent on Russia than Georgia and culturally dependent on Armenia. In addition to these factors, the weakness of central state institutions led to the de facto independence of the region from Tbilisi. During Gamsakhurdia's rule, the Javakheti region remained outside the jurisdiction of the central government, with state institutions having limited influence over local forces in the region [26, p. 4].

Another important trigger of the Armenian organisation in Javakheti is the Karabakh War. Azerbaijan's occupation of the Karabakh region had given Armenians a certain experience of war. Founded on 25 February 1988, the Javakhk People's Movement gradually strengthened with the outbreak of the First Karabakh War. "It organised to send Armenians from Javakheti to fight in Nagorno-Karabakh. It also formed its own armed groups" [2, p. 75]. As Wheatley notes, this organisation "managed to obtain weapons from the warehouses of the defunct Soviet Army and some of its members took part in the Karabakh war against Azerbaijan from 1988 to 1994" [31, p. 28].

Georgian academic Ramishvili believes that "the First Karabakh war was the main factor that gave rise to the Armenian nationalist movement in Georgia" [30, p. 19-20]. Many experts support the idea that "if the Armenians had not occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, they would have demanded the annexation of the Javakheti region of Georgia to Armenia".

The Javakhk organisation, which was established in an environment of ethnic tensions, rapidly politicised and increased its influence. In this context, this organisation can be considered as an oppositional political structure against Tbilisi. The organisation organised various protests in the region. Faced with the actions of Armenian separatists, Georgian authorities tried to maintain control over the region, but these efforts led to new conflicts and protests. In order to strengthen control in the region, the Gamsakhurdia administration introduced a system of appointed governors throughout Georgia. However, protests started in Javakheti region against these appointments. In Akhalkalaki, an armed group prevented the three centrally appointed governors from entering the administrative building, objecting to their being ethnic Georgians. Armenians demanded that the governor be ethnic Armenian [6, p. 202].

According to David Rstakyan, one of the leaders of the organisation, it was after Zviad Gamsakhurdia came to power that the Javakhk organisation acquired a nationalist identity, as "the organisation assumed the task of defending the rights of Armenians in the region in response to the threats posed by Georgian nationalists. The ethnic origin of the governor was of great importance, and for this reason a representative of Armenian origin was requested to serve in Akhalkalaki". However, the nationalist attitude of the Armenian organisations continued after Gamsakhurdia's rule. The clashes continued from January to November 1991. During this period "the paramilitary organisation Javakhk effectively controlled the region and remained outside Tbilisi's control throughout Gamsakhurdia's rule" [30, p.20]. Although the official goal of the organisation was declared as "the protection of the Armenian cultural heritage, the teaching of Armenian language and history in schools,



and the development of the region” [30, p. 20], it was aimed to demand autonomy within Georgia in the first stage and to annex the region to Armenia as the ultimate goal.

The organisation temporarily has a 24-member Council of Representatives and a 7-member governing body’ the governor’s office. [6, p. 202]. This council effectively administered the region, retaining control until a suitable candidate for the position of governor was appointed. The council’s activity came to an end when they forced the Georgian government to accept one of their own leaders, Samvel Petrosyan, as governor, and the council subsequently dissolved itself [31, p. 28]. Moreover, the issue of declaring the ‘independence of Javakheti’ was also raised at the ‘council’ meetings [6, p. 203].

In order to resolve the situation resulting from Gamsakhurdia’s activities, a new administrative organisation was introduced in Georgia after Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in 1994. With this arrangement, Javakheti region was merged with Meskheta region and Samtskhe-Javakheti region was established with Akhaltsihe as its centre. This change weakened Akhalkalaki’s status as a regional centre. However, the new arrangement led to increased protests in Javakheti and deepened tensions in the region. “Shevardnadze’s decision led to the launch of an intensive campaign among Javakheti Armenians demanding “independence”. More than 40,000 signatures were collected in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda for regional autonomy for Javakheti” [8, p. 81].

In 1995, during the adoption of the Constitution of Georgia, Armenians appealed to the President of Georgia, suggesting that the country should be organised into a federal structure as a way out of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali conflict [30, p. 20]. This demand was supported by the Armenian separatists of Javakheti, who met in the “Coordination Council of Javakheti Organisations and Movements”. The Armenians called on the President of Georgia and the parliament to grant the region “the constitutional right of self-government within the framework of the federal Republic of Georgia” [28, p. 41].

However, for the Georgian leadership, these demands of the Armenians were unacceptable. The Armenian desire for autonomy was seen as a new threat to the integrity of the state, as the leaders of Armenian organisations had set the secession of the region as their main goal. The Javakheti organisation, which reached its peak in the early 1990s, almost disintegrated in the late 1990s. In its place, new political organisations began to emerge, more aggressively demanding autonomy for Javakheti. One of these was ‘Virk, founded in 1995 in Akhalkalaki and led by David Rstakyan, who advocated autonomy and special language rights for Javakheti Armenians’ [19, p. 22]. Initially aiming to be established as a party, ‘Virk’ could not be registered as an ethnic political party according to the Georgian Constitution. The ‘Virk’ organisation “took an anti-Turkish and pro-Russian stance, stating that its main goals were to separate Javakheti from Georgia, to ensure the presence of Russian troops in the region and to prevent the pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey from passing through Javakheti” [8, p. 83].

Since 1995, with the end of the civil wars in Georgia, the country has stabilised. The central authorities regained control and tensions in the region decreased significantly, especially after the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Thus, the main goal of the Armenian organisations established in the 1990s was to take advantage of the difficult situation in Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union to make territorial claims in order to secede from the region and annex Javakheti to Armenia. The activities of Armenian organisations throughout the 1990s had a significant impact on the political dynamics of the region, increasing ethnic tensions and complicating the integration of Javakheti into Georgia’s political and social structure.

The coming to power of Mikheil Saakashvili and the launch of a comprehensive reform policy aimed at strengthening the state triggered a significant transformation process in the activities



of Armenian organisations in Georgia. The strengthening of the Georgian state has led to various concerns, especially among the Armenian population, and this has affected the inter-ethnic political dynamics.

“In particular, Saakshvili's promise to devolve power from the centre to local governments led to various reforms at the local level. However, instead of integrating the Armenians into the Georgian society as a whole, the reforms were interpreted as assimilation by the Armenians and raised concerns that their ethnic identity would disappear” [9, p. 71].

As in the previous period, many problems in the region remained unresolved. Economic backwardness, the integration of the Armenian minority into Georgian society, and the closure of the Russian military base have also been problems to be solved during Saakashvili's rule. President Saakashvili has visited the region many times and in his meetings with the inhabitants of the region has frequently emphasised that Georgia offers equal rights to all its citizens, regardless of their nationality [19, p. 9].

The language problem is one of the main problems faced by Armenians living in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. “Georgia's post-independence minority policies after the Rose Revolution made it compulsory for Armenians living in the region to learn Georgian in order to take part in the public sphere and benefit more from public services” [9, p. 67].

Despite significant changes under Saakashvili, Armenian organisations have not been satisfied with the clear and consistent policies of the Georgian government. “There are a number of standard themes around which the Javakheti people can be mobilised: initially the issue of the Russian military base was prominent, but this issue lost its relevance after Russia agreed to start withdrawing its troops. Then there was opposition to the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. Today, the main controversy is the demand for the affiliation of the churches in Javakheti to the Armenian Church” [26, p. 19]. These issues are strategically used by local Armenian organisations to increase their popularity and mobilise the Armenian population.

The other main organisations active in this period were the youth organisation JEMM (Javakheti Sports Youth Union) and United Javakh. This organisation “was established in 2001 as a non-governmental organisation with the main aim of organising sports events in Akhalkalaki and preventing the emigration of young people. In 2005, the leader of the group, Chahalyan, founded another political organisation - United Javakhk” [31, p. 29]. It has also been established that Chahalyan has links with the Armenian diaspora in France and wealthy Armenian businessmen in Russia [26, p. 21].

Both “Javakheti Youth and Sports Union” and “United Javakh” were known for their radical stances and nationalist programmes. These organisations have declared an active nationalist platform by gathering the youth organisations in the region under their umbrella and have used controversial propaganda methods [19, p. 22].

They also organised mass demonstrations and political protests demanding greater representation of Armenians in state offices and other official institutions [19, p. 4]. On 5 October 2006, the results of the local elections in Akhalkalaki caused controversy. Following the elections, supporters of United Javakhk, known for their separatist sentiments, staged protests and demanded the cancellation of the results in 12 villages [19, p. 18]. The protesters tried to seize the office of the District Election Commission in Javakheti, but the demonstrations were ended by police intervention [31, p. 30].

In the predominantly Armenian districts, Armenians hold high positions in the executive authorities and municipalities. In both Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, ethnic Armenians head the executive authorities. In Akhalkalaki in particular, 84 per cent of municipal employees are Armeni-



ans [19, p. 12]. In general, key positions at district level in this region, such as the police chief, prosecutor and chief judge, are also held by Armenians [31, p. 18].

In the early 2000s, “the dependence of the majority of Armenians on Russian military bases for their livelihoods was one of the major obstacles to Georgian national unity” [9, p. 69]. The economic downturn under Shevardnadze forced the local population to look for alternative ways of earning a living. One of the alternatives for Armenians was the Russian base that had long been established in the region. The presence of the base made Javakheti difficult to integrate into Georgia [29, p. 15]. In March 2005, the Georgian government took a decisive step. Against the decision of the Georgian government to close the bases, a large protest demonstration was held on 13 March 2005 in Akhalkalaki, United Javakhs [26, p. 26].

On 3 May 2006, Armenian organisations in Samtskhe-Javakheti appealed to the Georgian government. “The situation after the withdrawal of the base is uncertain. As Georgia continues its efforts to join NATO, it was stated that after the withdrawal of Russian troops from the region, Turkish troops might take their place”. However, in time, it became clear that the “fears” expressed by the Armenians did not materialise. In 2007 and 2008, the United Javakh's influence significantly decreased and the organisation sadly began to disintegrate.

In conclusion, the reforms introduced in Georgia after Mikheil Saakashvili came to power have caused serious concerns, especially among the Armenian population. Georgia's efforts to strengthen the state structure have caused concerns among Armenians in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. However, the initiatives of the Saakashvili government again failed to meet the expectations of the Armenians.

External factors

An ongoing problem in Armenia-Georgia relations is the issue of churches in Georgia. “Armenians claim that some churches and religious shrines, especially in Javakheti and even in Tbilisi, belong to the Armenian national history and were confiscated by the state” [17, p. 74]. According to some circles in Armenia, Georgia is committing “cultural genocide” by appropriating Armenian cultural heritage. Publications in Armenia claim that there are about 650 Armenian churches in Georgia. Georgian intellectuals argue that these allegations are invalid, but are deeply concerned that these allegations are being made for future political demands [2].

It is known from history that the Armenian Church “had a great influence on the Armenian population” [11]. As Iskefieli states, “religion, especially the church, plays an important role in the formation of Armenian identity. The influence of the Church on Armenian identity is so great that for Armenians the concepts of religion and nationality, the Church and the Armenian language are intertwined” [14, p. 237].

At the end of the 20th century, the Armenian Church supported separatist movements in Abkhazia and Samtskhe-Javakheti, beginning with the restoration of Georgian independence. The Church was more than a religious institution [8, p. 84]. The Armenian Church participated in the territorial claims of Armenia, Armenian organisations and government officials against Georgia. Not content with Javakheti and Tbilisi, the Armenian Church also claimed historical and cultural heritage in Abkhazia. Indeed, this was perceived by the Armenian Church as a violation of the recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity by Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili in 2019. The Armenian media, often addressing the issue of determining the status of churches, blames the Georgian government and sees this as a policy against the Armenian population and culture in Georgia [1, p. 5].

The branch of the Armenian Church in Georgia is located in the Surb Gevorg Church in Tbilisi. Being part of the Armenian Apostolic Church, it is governed by the laws and decrees of the Armenian Catholicosate [25].



The Armenian Church makes its claims about a number of churches located on the territory of Georgia on the official website of the Church. ‘The Armenian Church is demanding that the Georgian authorities return 442 Armenian churches in pre-Soviet Georgia, now destroyed or in ruins’, [25.] the website reads. As the Georgian researcher Chedia writes, “for some countries religion is a tool to achieve long-term political goals” [32, p. 107].

On 14 October 2017, the Armenian Church in Georgia organised a protest action entitled “Let's Protect the Armenian Historical and Cultural Heritage of Tbilisi” to express its dissatisfaction with the policy of the country's authorities [20].

The Armenian Church has an influence on various Armenian organisations. For example, the Church has various partnerships with the Hayartun Youth Cultural Centre, founded in 2005 in Tbilisi, the Alexander Mantashev Cultural Centre in Batumi, and the Rafael Javakhhk Youth Centre in Ninotsminda [25]. “Our goal is to help Armenians to prevent assimilation, which threatens Armenians, especially in Tbilisi”, Levon Chidilian, the head of the Hayartun Youth Cultural Centre, said in an interview. About ten youth centres have been opened in Georgia with the support of the Armenian Church.

The Georgian researcher Chedia states that “Georgia strives to maintain good neighbourly relations with Armenia, but the conflicts over the church have brought to light the deep contradictions between the two countries” [32, p. 117]. In order to solve this problem, it can be emphasised that Armenia's church guide should withdraw its territorial claims against Georgia. At first glance, it seems possible to understand this as a struggle for the protection of historical and cultural heritage. However, an in-depth analysis of the issue reveals that today's seizures of churches have the potential to form the basis for future territorial claims.

Armenia's policy towards Georgia was determined by its anti-Turkish ideology against Turkey and Azerbaijan and its economic situation. Because Armenia organised most of its economic relations through Georgia and continued to meet its oil and natural gas needs through Georgia. Therefore, although the Armenian government attached great importance to its relations with Georgia, it sometimes did not hesitate to make statements that would disturb Georgia regarding the Javakheti issue. “Despite the mutual declarations of good neighbourliness made by the officials of the two countries during visits and meetings, the relations between the two countries are dominated by mistrust and rivalry. This mistrust and rivalry deeply affect the relations” [2, p. 63]. Although Armenia is not openly at war with Georgia, it has not given up its claims over Javakheti. Armenia supported the social, cultural and political organisation of Armenians living in Georgia and continued to coordinate their activities.

Although Armenia has at times made territorial claims on Georgia, it was unable to openly support Armenian separatists in the Javakheti region in the 1990s. A number of reasons have influenced Armenia's behaviour. “Geopolitical realities forced Iravan to exert a restraining influence on Javakheti Armenians, since at that time the war in Karabakh and the occupation of Azerbaijani territories had already begun” [6, p. 205]. The military aggression against Azerbaijan not only disrupted Armenia's commercial ties with Azerbaijan, but also resulted in Turkey closing the border in solidarity. As a result, Armenia's landlocked links with the rest of the world are limited to either Iran or Georgia.

At the end of the 20th century, the leaders of Armenian nationalist organisations, sensing the imminent collapse of the USSR, began to draw up plans for the expansion of a future independent Armenia. The Dashnaktsutyun party and other nationalist organisations, which had disappeared during the Soviet era, reappeared. In 1985, the XXIII Congress of Dashnaktsutyun convened in Athens, the capital of Greece. There was only one issue on the agenda of the congress: The expansion of the territory of Armenia. Only one question caused disagreement among the delegates of the



Congress - from which direction to start - from the west, from Karabakh, the territory of Azerbaijan, or from the north, from Akhalkalaki, the territory of Georgia. According to the results of the voting, by a margin of one vote, it was decided to start the occupation of Karabakh from the Azerbaijani direction [12].

Speaking about the influence and role of Armenia, the leaders of the Javakhetian organisations openly stated that they had ties with the political forces in Armenia [19, p. 21]. In the 1990s, members of Armenian terrorist organisations such as Dashnaktsutyun, Krunk and Asala were actively engaged in subversive activities in the south of Georgia. The head of the Armenian-Aryan organisation Armen Avetisyan made the following threatening statement to the newspaper "Asaval-dasavali" about "Javakheti was ours, now it is yours, will you give it to us peacefully? If so, then good, if not, war is inevitable! Javakheti is Armenian territory and must be returned to Armenia... If we have to, we will fight to regain our homeland..." [12].

Speaking about the influence of Armenia on the organisations in Georgia, Jabbarli wrote: The mechanism of organisation of Javakheti Armenians by the Armenian government can be divided into two types: "doves" and "hawks". The Armenian government voices the Javakheti Armenians' demands for independence through "doves" and when the Georgian government does not respond positively, it threatens the government and puts forward "hawks" [5, p. 355].

According to Georgian historian Ramishvili, Javakh's radical figures were under the influence of the Dashnaktsutyun party, which was known for terrorist acts throughout its history. The emergence of the Javakheti conflict can be perceived as a threat, but also as a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity. Javakheti is of great strategic importance not only for Georgia but also for Armenia. Therefore, the issue of Javakheti Armenians is not only a domestic issue for Georgia, but also of regional significance [30, p. 21].

Bochoroshvili, a member of the Georgian parliament, stated that the Armenian government controls the activities of Georgian Armenians and that the Javakhk organisation cannot demand autonomy without the consent of Iravan. During his visit to Javakheti, Stepan Margaryan, Advisor to the Armenian Prime Minister, stated that the Armenian demand for autonomy from the Georgian government does not violate the Georgian Constitution [5, p. 354]. After Robert Kocharyan came to power in Armenia, official state officials made statements that worried Georgia.

For instance, Armenian MP Vahan Onanessian's statement that he "considers the Armenia-Georgia border as a front line" was met with irritation in Georgia. [5, p. 353]. Former Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan stated that he would support the granting of official language status to Armenian in Javakheti [1, p. 2].

"I believe that the recognition of Armenian as a regional language in Javakheti and steps to preserve Armenian monuments in Georgia will strengthen Armenia-Georgia's friendly relations and increase mutual trust. We must approach all these issues sensitively, but at the same time we must be persistent and principled" [19, p. 12].

Armenia realised that a possible conflict in Javakheti would affect Armenia, thus closing Armenia's exit to the Black Sea and leaving it economically dependent only on Iran. In addition, given the dire state of its economy, it took restrictive steps on Javakheti Armenians in order to reduce tensions in the region. "Georgian scholars generally agree that Armenia is the key to peace in Javakheti" [6, p. 205].

In Armenia, there are organisations such as "Zor Hayrenik" and "Union of Intellectuals" that deal with the problems of Javakheti Armenians. In addition, it was found that "Armenians in Javakheti were in close contact with the Dashnaktsutyun party and some of its leaders continued their activities in Akhalkalaki after the party was banned in Armenia in 1994" [8, p. 82].



Offensive statements against Georgia were increasingly heard from Armenian politicians. “Armenia's policy of friendship with Georgia is very costly for us, the price of this policy is the loss of Javakheti. Georgia's arrogance makes us think that it is time for Armenia to change its policy towards this country” [32, p. 116].

For a period of time, the Prime Minister of Armenia had a special adviser on Javakheti affairs [30, p. 22]. This means that Armenia is addressing the Javakheti problem at the highest state level and with a specific purpose. Armenian organisations in Javakheti have received assistance from the highly influential Armenian community in the United States and France [26, p. 19]. Thus, Armenia's policy towards Georgia is based on many factors, particularly the situation of the Armenian population in the Javakheti region and Armenia's anti-Turkic ideology. Armenia has tried to keep its economic relations with Georgia balanced, which are of vital importance, especially with regard to energy supplies, while at the same time defending and supporting the separatist movements of Javakheti Armenians. However, geopolitical difficulties and the regional uncertainties brought about by the First Karabakh War have limited Armenia's position on this issue.

Despite the fact that Georgia has always remained neutral in the Karabakh war, Armenians living in Georgia ignored the official position of the state and engaged in anti-state activities and initiatives.

On September 27, 2020, in response to the wide provocation carried out by Armenia, the Azerbaijani Army decided to launch a counter-offensive operation along the entire front line in order to stop the attacks and ensure the safety of the civilian population. Thus, the Second Karabakh War began. The 44-day (September 27 - November 8, 2020) Second Karabakh War ended with the victory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the war, the occupied Azerbaijani territories were liberated.

The Karabakh war became the center of attention not only in the world media, but also in the Georgian media. Armenia's media has engaged in disinformation against Georgia.

On September 28, 2020, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili posted on his Facebook page that “Nagorno-Karabakh is a sovereign territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and nothing will change this” and declared his support for Azerbaijan in its fight for its rights. Soon after, Saakashvili was accused by Armenians of making “anti-Armenian” statements. On October 1, 2020, around 300 Armenian protesters staged a protest in front of the Georgian internet TV channel Mtavari Arkhi, claiming that the channel was pro-Azerbaijani regarding the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia [18].

At the same time, in the village of Kartsakhi, located on the border in Javakheti, Armenians tried to send cargo to Armenia, possibly destined for Karabakh. According to the protesters, they blocked the road in Javakheti to stop trucks allegedly supplying arms from Turkey to Azerbaijan via Georgia. The situation worsened when disinformation spread on the Internet that Georgia had authorized the transportation of weapons from Turkey to Azerbaijan. However, the head of the parliamentary defense and security committee, Irakli Sesiashvili, said that Georgia did not allow the transportation of military cargo from either side during the war [4].

The Second Karabakh War in 2020 was a conflict that started with Armenia's provocations, continued with Azerbaijan's counter-offensive and ultimately ended with an Azerbaijani victory. This war profoundly affected not only the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also regional security and international relations. Armenia's disinformation campaigns against Georgia and its influence on the media created serious tensions both for the Armenian population inside Georgia and for regional security.



CONCLUSION

In the early 1990s, the process of Georgian independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to serious ethnic and political tensions in the Javakheti region. Armenian nationalism gained strength under Gamsakhurdia's rule and demands for independence from Georgia emerged. Under the influence of the First Karabakh War, Armenian organizations and radical groups in Javakheti engaged in various political and military actions with the aim of annexing the region to Armenia. In this process, the actions of Armenians in Javakheti led to clashes with the Georgian administration, deepening tensions in the region. After 1994, political stability was restored in Georgia. However, ethnic tensions in the region have not completely ended. Armenian organizations in Javakheti continued to voice their demand for autonomy, thus complicating Javakheti's integration into Georgia and affecting the ethnic and political structure in the region.

The reforms introduced in Georgia after Mikheil Saakashvili came to power have caused serious concerns, especially among the Armenian population. Georgia's efforts to strengthen the state structure have caused identity concerns especially among the Armenian population in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The reforms were perceived by Armenians as a form of assimilation, which triggered efforts by local Armenian organizations to mobilize the population. The Saakashvili government's initiatives did not meet the expectations of Armenians. The influence of Armenian organizations, especially the radical and nationalist rhetoric of United Javakh, encouraged separatist tendencies in the region and led to conflicts at the local level. Over time, however, the popularity of these organizations declined.

Armenia's relations with Georgia and the Javakheti issue have been shaped by an effort to maintain a balance between regional security and economic factors, but the mistrust and rivalry in these relations have at times led to mutual threats and tensions. Cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia is at the center of energy and trade projects in the region, increasing the strategic importance of the South Caucasus. However, Armenia has consistently opposed these collaborations and has viewed Georgia's participation in these projects negatively. Armenia's attitude has manifested itself in obstructions and provocations against regional projects, especially through the Armenians living in the Javakheti region.

Armenia's policy has negatively affected not only the relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan, but also the security and political balances in the region. Nevertheless, this attitude of Armenia has led to its isolation and regional isolation over time. Moreover, Armenia's aggressive stance in Karabakh and the new tensions that emerged after the war further complicated relations in the region. The Second Karabakh War was not only a military conflict, but also a turning point that reshaped the balance of power in the South Caucasus and profoundly affected regional alliances and security relations.

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GÜRCÜSTANDA ERMƏNİ TƏŞKİLATLARI: SAMTSXE-CAVAXETİ NÜMUNƏSİNDƏ

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Bu məqalənin məqsədi Gürcüstanın Samtsxe-Cavaxeti regionunda yaradılmış erməni təşkilatlarını təhlil etməkdir. Samtsxe-Cavaxeti regionu Gürcüstanda ermənilərin kompakt yaşadığı yerdır. Məqalədə erməni təşkilatlarının məqsədləri, vəzifələri və fəaliyyət istiqamətləri nəzərdən keçirilir, onların fəaliyyətinə təsir edən daxili və xarici amillər təhlil edilir. 1991-ci ildə SSRİ-nin dağılması ilə Gürcüstan müstəqilliyini bərpa etdi. SSRİ-nin dağılması Gürcüstanda dərin sosial-siyasi və iqtisadi böhrana, habelə dövlət quruculuğu prosesində çətinliklərə səbəb oldu. Ölkənin Abxaziya və Sxinvali bölgələrində separatçı hərəkətlər baş vermişdir. Bu tədqiqat işi kontent-analiz metoduna əsaslanır.

Açar sözlər: *erməni, Samsxe-Cavaxeti, Gürcüstan, separatizm, əsassız iddialar*

АРМЯНСКИЕ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ В ГРУЗИИ: НА ПРИМЕРЕ САМЦХЕ-ДЖАВАХЕТИ

Н.А. Маммадова

Цель данной статьи – проанализировать армянские организации, созданные в регионе Грузии Самцхе-Джавахети. Регион Самцхе-Джавахети где проживает компактно армянское меньшинство в Грузии. В статье рассматриваются основные цели, задачи и направления деятельности армянских организаций, а также анализируются внутренние и внешние факторы, влияющие на их деятельность. В 1991 году, с распадом СССР, Грузия восстановила свою независимость. Распад СССР привел к глубокому социально-политическому и экономическому кризису в Грузии, а также к трудностям в процессе государственного строительства. Кроме того, осложняющим фактором стала гражданская война в регионах Абхазии и Цхинвали, вызванная сепаратистскими движениями. Данное исследование основано на качественном анализе и использовании вторичных источников.

Ключевые слова: *армяне, Самцхе-Джавахети, Грузия, сепаратизм, необоснованные претензии*