

Egbert Jahn (ed.)



# **Nationalism in Late and Post-Communist Europe**

Volume 2  
Nationalism in the Nation States

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## Georgia and its new national movement\*

*Oliver Reisner*

### *1 Introduction*

In his contribution to a comparable volume from 1910 on the first wave of European national movements, Zurab Avalishvili, a Georgian historian at St. Petersburg University, characterised the “national question” in his native country as follows:

“the uncertainty of this question and the general frailty of the Georgian national movement appears to be a direct consequence of a social structure in which the upper classes were subjected to assimilation and the loss of individuality. However, the masses, largely ensnared in their antiquated rural lifestyles, directly formed the ethnographic material for a nation that is connected within a conscious unit.”<sup>1</sup>

In his opinion, the politicisation of the Georgian nation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had not yet progressed very far. Eighty years later, this table seemed to have turned in the new Georgian national movement as, at last, under its own powers or the internal weaknesses of the Soviet state, it has regained independence – at least formally.

### *2 Background: Historical references and political culture*

#### 2.1 Historical references

The modern Georgian nation was born around 1860 with the emergence of an intelligentsia from the noble classes. For the first time, they devised a reform project as the “rebirth of the Georgian nation”, which was to draw on the “golden era” of Georgia in the Middle Ages. This group’s leader, Ilia Chavchavadze, summed up the

\* The manuscript in German was completed in 2000.

<sup>1</sup> Avalov 1910, p. 492.

project in the slogan “Fatherland, Language, Faith”. In doing so, they set themselves apart, initially in cultural matters, from both the Russian administrative elite and the predominantly Armenian economic elite. Their political demands amounted to a status of autonomy within the tsardom.<sup>2</sup> The ambivalent dissociation from Russia was intensified by the rivalry with a Marxist group that championed the social variant of the national questions. As a party that was indifferent to the questions of national culture and the demands for autonomy, the Mensheviks in Georgia voiced the farmers’ interests and accordingly enjoyed wide support among the predominately agrarian population. Ironically, by rejecting the October Revolution on 26 May 1918, they unintentionally declared the independence of the country, thereby introducing the three-year-long intermezzo that was the “Democratic Republic of Georgia”. Therefore, independence in 1918 did not come about due to any direct aspirations for it, but rather resulted from the collapse of the tsardom with its domestic and foreign policy troubles along with the Georgian-Menshevik rejection of the Bolshevik October Revolution. Nonetheless, a nation-state consciousness emerged among Georgians in the mere three years of the Democratic Republic of Georgia’s existence. In the last days of the Republic in February 1921, the only things left standing in the capital of Tbilisi were its own political constitution and then the 10th Red Army. Their invasion was interpreted as the “second Russian annexation” after the initial incorporation by the tsardom in 1801. At that time, there were conflicts with Armenians concerning the border demarcation and with the Abkhazians regarding their political status.<sup>3</sup> After beginning as a part of a “Transcaucasian Federal Soviet Republic”, from 1922 to 1936, Soviet leaders then created a type of pseudo-state in the form of the Georgian SSR with territorial borders and proper institutions and, at the same time, a new social class of urban Georgians developed through rapid urbanisation and the introduction of general school education in the Georgian language, whose social and economic status was connected to the institutions of this pseudo-state. Ironically, they directly contributed to the ethnic consolidation of Georgians.<sup>4</sup>

At 70.1 per cent, Georgians had become in 1989 the largest segment of the population in the Republic (1959: 64.3 per cent; 1970: 66.8). Apart from the migration of Russians and Armenians, a reason for this rise is the pressure to assimilate among small minorities (e.g. Ossetians). At 95.1 per cent, Georgia was second only to Lithuania in 1989 with the highest concentration of a titular nation within the Republic’s territory, and 98.2 per cent declared Georgian to be their native language, yet only 33.1 per cent were proficient in Russian. These figures were two to three points higher with Abkhazians and Ossetians. Also the small number of intermarriages (men 7.5 per cent and women 4.8 per cent) displays a strong ethnic consolidation among Georgians during Soviet times.

2 Reisner 1995; Reisner 1994.

3 Jones 1992b; Jones 1988.

4 Aves 1993, p. 233; Parsons 1982.

The strong attachment to “Georgianness”<sup>5</sup> and the Soviet policy of indigenisation (*korenizacija*) as well as devolution of powers for the Republics since the mid-1950s led to Georgian hegemony over political and cultural life in the Soviet Republic. Due to the political culture, a monopolisation of strategic and administrative positions by Georgians emerged. Making up 79 per cent of CP members, they were widely overrepresented, which can be clearly seen in the appointments for leading positions. In 1989, they held 89.3 per cent of leading posts while making up 70.1 per cent of the population. The only exceptions were the autonomous administrative districts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where the respective titular nations dominated.

A similar pattern can also be observed in cultural and academic circles. Georgians were widely overrepresented in higher education in the Republic in 1979 with 94 per cent of all students (1969: 82.6 per cent). Georgia had the highest percentage of university graduates, specialists working in the economic sector as well as white-collar professions, part of the “new middle classes” in the USSR. In 1985, 91 per cent of all books published in Georgia and 83 per cent of all newspapers were in Georgian. This ethnic consolidation was accompanied by a slow process of decolonialisation.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 Political culture

Due to permanent personal aspirations for dominance, uncertainty and instability characterise public life so much that the country’s rather Mediterranean character differs greatly from its northern neighbour of Russia. Men often have to prove themselves publicly as such, which apart from “manly” behaviour also means the demonstrative possession of merchandise, consumer goods or symbols of power. In such a dynamic environment, hierarchical, formalised and official relations in state authorities, for example, appear to be inhibitory as they evoke conflicts and antagonism. Relationships are only personalised and not presented in an abstract form. Most important is the individual positioning and development of a personal (informal) network of connections, which requires resources that were not available in the official economy during Soviet times. According to Mars and Altman, this was the motivation and dynamic force that drove the Georgian shadow economy. Personal trust and the virtue of mutual, personal loyalty in the form of friendships or “brotherhood” are essential, which proves to be stronger than any loyalty felt towards an abstract state or principle conviction. Competition among friends is namely nonexistent. Precisely trust and loyalty were indispensable in this illegal shadow economy as no agreement

5 In Georgian, *kartveloba* refers to a historical and linguistic-cultural community understanding among Georgians. I must unfortunately forego a more in depth description of this term.

6 Gerber 1997, pp. 40-44; Jones 1992, pp. 74-75; on institutionalisation of ethnicity in general, see Zaslavsky 1991, pp. 9-21.

could be signed or any legal action taken.<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, the Soviet state and ideology were not able to take root in Georgia and were seen as a part of the unavoidable relationship to Russia. The institutions of civil liberties and the territorial constitutional state also remained foreign. As such, Georgians were able to free themselves relatively easily from the ideological weight of communism after the death of Stalin, the “Great Georgian”<sup>8</sup> There were various traditional strategies one could choose from in order to adapt to, or thwart, these restrictive relations. Attitudes did not change but were actually stabilised. In order to get anywhere with bureaucrats prone to shy away from responsibility, an applicant had to demonstrate his trustworthiness by implicitly presenting the following characteristics:

1. the belief in the Georgians’ superiority to others, among whom there was no deceit, belittlement or criticism among compatriots (generalised reciprocity),
2. the preference of the Georgian traditional faith in culture, honour, family and fellow countrymen before the Soviet era; a consciousness of their own history.
3. the refusal to assimilate to Soviet customs, which in real terms were seen as Russian, and adherence to “Georgian” mannerisms, whatever was meant by that.<sup>9</sup>

Given a lack of empirical surveys in this area, there is a need for more in depth study on the extent to which this mostly situational use of a national affiliation can be suggestive of the importance the nation or, moreover, national identity has in Georgia as the highest value relative to all other differences and group ties.<sup>10</sup>

### 3 *The incubation period of the national movement (1972-1987)*

The political elite in the form of the Communist Party of Georgia (CPG) had quite a colonial character. As an elite that was instated by the central party leadership in Moscow and thus dependent on their mercy, they had neither political legitimation from nor responsibility towards the population of the Republic whatsoever. Their “passive participation” in a paternalistic-Soviet version of a contract of association was to be secured through subsidies from Moscow for consumer goods and culture.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the CPG appeared less as a political party and more as a controlling so-

7 Mars/ Altmann 1983; Köhler 1994; cf. Gerber 1997: “Nearly the entire party, government and economic apparatus was integrated into a network of family, kinsman and compatriot relations and enabled a prosperous shadow economy to emerge” (p. 39).

8 The protest of several thousand adolescents against Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation and to ensure the memory of Stalin was violently repressed on 9 March 1956. Gerber 1997, pp. 34-40.

9 Dragadze 1988, p. 32; HDR 1997, pp. 6-9.

10 Scepticism on this matter is discussed by Köhler 1995, pp. 10-11.

11 Aves 1993; Dragadze 1988, p. 26; on the Beria period (1935-1953) cf. Fairbanks 1978 and 1983 and Knight 1996.



cial class with the corresponding corporatism. The Georgian nomenklatura made up of the party elite and the artistic and academic intelligentsia increasingly eschewed Moscow's control by way of nepotism and patronage relations. In order to re-establish its control, Moscow reacted by appointing a new party secretary in Vasil Mzhavanadze (1953-1972) and later Eduard Shevardnadze (1972-1985). Raised in the cabal of the CP, familiar with the country's problems and, as party secretary, the inner workings of power, Shevardnadze developed political tact and an ability for compromise. Appointed by Brezhnev in 1972, the then forty-two year old was to crack down on the economic crisis, corruption, the shadow economy and nepotism, the church, strong Georgian traditions (e.g. extensive banquets), "Georgian-centrism" and ethnic favouritism, all elements that point to a structural crisis.

Since the 1960s the immensely growing technical, artistic and academic intelligentsia in Georgia had increasingly showed national self-confidence which was challenged in the following decade by Shevardnadze's Moscow policies.<sup>12</sup> Academia and cultural matters were dominated by national topics. Initially, Shevardnadze reacted with repression to "nationalist divergences", for example when the official version of the Sovietisation of Georgia was put into question. Starting in 1972, there were subversive, partly violent individual rebellious acts and a dissident movement emerged, which formed up as the "Helsinki Group". They were discredited and persecuted by the state apparatus and ultimately arrested in March 1977. Other isolated initiatives suffered a similar fate at the beginning of the 1980s. After their release, many of them were to take up leading positions in the national movement at the end of the 1980s. Nonetheless, Gerber does not see the dissidents as "reform-oriented prophets", rather "oppositionists who vehemently rejected the Soviet Union as a model for both state and society and saw their nation as a victim of Russian expansionism" and their "demands were able to obtain consensus throughout the country".<sup>13</sup> By and large, the dissidents' concerns focused less on human rights and civil liberties rather more on the collective return to their own language, religion and tradition as well as independence for an indivisible Georgia.

In 1978, the dispute over defending Georgian as the official language produced another societal force that sought to protect their national autonomy and self-reliance: the youth movement made up of school pupils and university students. No longer socialised by Stalinism or the "thaw" period, they experienced the worst of the isolation and lack of perspectives created by the Soviet social order. Thousands of them gathered in front of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia on 14 April 1978 and

12 Until the end of the USSR, there were difficulties in adequately integrating the potential of specialists into the labour process. For more detail, see Dobson 1975 and Gerber 1997, pp. 51-60.

13 Gerber 1997, pp. 61-73; quote from p. 73. The centuries-long influence by foreign major powers allowed the stance on these groups to become a component of internal disputes and part of a political strategy in the search for a patron saint. The rejection of Russia was accompanied by the emphasis on the common European heritage in Christianity. Nodia 1996; HDR 1996, pp. 32-36.

prevented a constitutional amendment from passing, in which Russian was to replace Georgian as the official language. In this case, for the first time decision-making by the state and party showed a more civilized tone thanks to Shevardnadze's willingness to give in. As such, among the national sentiments that were more and more openly expressed, the already fine line between "orthodox" and "unorthodox" nationalism became even more fragile.<sup>14</sup> The pupils and students demanded the release of the imprisoned dissidents. In the 1980s, the younger generation of leaders in the national movement was to emerge from their own social environment (those born in the late fifties and early sixties), as they organised acts of resistance against the protection of the environment and culture or the Russian-Georgian friendship among the peoples initiated for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1813.<sup>15</sup> The "endangered" status of the Georgian language continued to be a topic. Consequently, starting in the 1970s the multi-faceted societal problems were reduced to a national-Georgian perspective.

Shevardnadze reacted to this by granting the cultural and academic elite more room to express an "orthodox nationalism", in order to win favour with them.<sup>16</sup> However, the dissidents' "unorthodox nationalism" continued to be decisively fought by the CPG. The Russification measures<sup>17</sup> remained therefore unsuccessful. Though, as one of Brezhnev's partisans, Shevardnadze successfully mediated between Moscow's demands and the growing national discontent in Georgia. The wide-ranging administrative and economic experiments for the USSR, born out of the pressure to reform, with the goal of overcoming nepotism and shadow economies made him into a political pragmatist beyond the realms of his Soviet republic.<sup>18</sup>

The strengthening of the Georgian national identity came at the detriment of non-Georgian ethnic groups, which after all made up almost one third of the population and were particularly concentrated in the marginal areas of Georgia.<sup>19</sup> With the

14 Rakowska-Harmstone 1974, p. 4 defines "orthodox" nationalism as one that strives to achieve political, economic and cultural autonomy within an existing system; "unorthodox" on the other hand seeks out independence through the path of secession and rejects the dominant ideology.

15 Among them were Gia Ch'anturia, Tamara Cheidze, Irakli Cereteli and others.

16 This was noticeable above all in Georgian literature and film, as is shown, for instance, by the most famous example, the 1982 film "Repentance" (Pokajanie/ monanieba) by Tengiz Abuladze produced for Georgian television. A case study on the historical background of this film would be very insightful.

17 The Sovietisation of the language and culture (expansion of the teaching of Russian to the detriment of Georgian) that took place after the 'shock' from the 1970 census was considered as Russification. This led to intense reactions on the part of the Georgian intelligentsia such as in the author's association. Jones 1992a, p. 75.

18 Cf. e.g. Gerber 1997, pp. 44-51.

19 Even though the Abkhazians in the Abkhazian ASSR represented only 17.8 per cent compared to 45.7 per cent Georgians, in their northernmost rayon of Gudauta there were 53 per cent Abkhazians and only 13 per cent Georgians. In the districts of Znauri and Java in the South Ossetia autonomous oblast around 90 per cent of the population are Ossetians. However, of the 164,000 Ossetians roughly 100,000 lived outside of these regions in other parts of Georgia.

autonomous regions of Abkhazian ASSR and the South Ossetia Autonomous Region, where the titular ethnic groups did not even make up the largest minority groups, an “implicit” claim to favouritism was transformed into a guarantee of rights, which stipulated the inequality between titular ethnic group and non-dominant ethnic groups. The latter were simply privileged in terms of cadre issues within their region; otherwise they remained excluded from all other decision-making processes on the Republic level.<sup>20</sup> With the help of the central party in Moscow, they attempted to push through their interests *vis-à-vis* Tbilisi, accepted Russian in place of Georgian for their studies, professions and party careers. Correspondingly, Georgians perceived the autonomies\* as marionettes of the interests in Moscow and not as independent entities. In the 1970s, Shevardnadze tried to use structural help to rescind the relative neglect of non-Georgian regions due to the Georgian control of economic administration. The economic indicators, however, continued to point to a relative underdevelopment not only in the autonomies but also, for example, in the Marneuli district predominantly inhabited by ethnic Azeris.<sup>21</sup>

The Georgian national movement repudiated the existence of an unequally high pressure to assimilate felt by the Abkhazians and Ossetians along with non-privileged small ethnicities, and did not assure them of any guarantee of existence or an appropriate political status.<sup>22</sup> Reproaches and suspicion prevailed instead of mutual understanding. Stalin’s and Beria’s repression against ethnic groups were kept secret, history was used exploitatively and latent conflicts between Tbilisi and the autonomous regions were not made public. By remaining silent with the argument that “one shouldn’t aggravate the situation”, the Communists uncontestedly cleared the playing field on both sides for the nationalists and are therefore jointly responsible for the worsening of the conflicts. As a result, the national political perspective became the leading opinion in Georgia by the 1970s. Tensions continued to persist, escalating more and more with the increased national activities in Georgia, which, in turn, led the Abkhazians in spring 1978 to demand annexation by the RSFSR or that they be granted their own Union Republic, in order to skirt a reputed “Georgianisation”. On the flip side, the Georgian population in Abkhazia could be portrayed as a

The Azeris, of which the percentage of the population doubled from 1959 to 1989, in the district of Dmanisi made up 64 per cent (Georgians: 28 per cent), in Bolnisi 66 per cent (22 per cent) and in Marneuli 80 per cent (7 per cent). In the districts of Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe, the Armenians constituted roughly ca. 90 per cent, the Georgians merely 2 per cent of the population. Gerber (1997), pp. 207, 282-284; HDR 1995, pp. 105-108; Gachechiladze 1995, pp. 73-104, 169-184.

20 Ethnic hierarchisation is not a Georgian rather a Soviet phenomenon; however it is repudiated by many Georgians with regard to their own relations towards non-dominant ethnic groups. cp. e.g. Bremmer 1993; Gussejnov 1994; Gerber 1997, pp 119f.

\* Editor’s note: Russian term for autonomous regions.

21 Slider 1985; Fuller 1988.

22 One of the few people who recognized such a necessity and in turn demanded action by the national movement was the philosopher Merab Mamardashvili 1990; Hammel 1995.

“discriminated majority”.<sup>23</sup> The Moscow CP-Central Committee recognised the explosive force of the national issue much too late. After Shevardnadze was appointed the Soviet Foreign Minister in summer 1985, his preferred candidate and confidant, Soliko Khabeishvili, was not named first party secretary rather the lacklustre technocrat Jumber Patiashvili,<sup>24</sup> who gradually proceeded to remove the Shevardnadze fraction from power and partly had them arrested on charges of corruption. The liberal climate in which “orthodox nationalism” emerged and the openness of the mass media and culture associations were brought to an end. Renewed repression against faithful believers and dissidents started again and continued to characterise the political climate until 1987. The KPG did not react to the structural crisis, for example the markedly deteriorating living conditions in the country and the rationing of certain basic food stuffs even though Georgians were informed about the grievances in the USSR by way of increased transparency (*glasnost*) in the main Soviet media. As such, questions of environmental or cultural protection caused uproar among the general public in Georgia, as they were interpreted as a “national threat”. The mad major project of the Transcaucasian Railway through the high mountains and the disastrous effects of a military training ground close to the centuries-old monastery of Davit Gareja became the focus of their discontent; these were initially taken up by critical intellectuals as Akaki Bakradze in the newspaper of the *lit’erat’uruli sakartvelo* author’s association and used as a pretext for demands for increased national self-determination. Although the cancellation of the railway construction project was more a result of financial and economic planning errors rather than public pressure, the KGB was further discredited, despite perestroika, as being reluctant to reform and an opponent of social, ecological and thus the national interests. Representatives of the national elite from the party, academia and culture along side dissidents and representatives of the youth movement were able to build a wide consensus among the people that made a mass movement possible.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4 *The Georgian national movement and the failed transformation (1987-1991/92)*

In October 1987, the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Ilia Chavchavadze, the leading national activist in the 19th century and the personified symbol of the Georgian cultural nation, marked the beginning of the end of Soviet rule in Georgia. With wide-ranging offi-

23 For more detail, see Gerber 1997, pp. 115-135; for views of the conflict from an Abkhazian perspective see Hewitt 1989 and 1993.

24 Gerber 1997, pp. 152, surmises that Egor Ligachev, Gorbachev’s adversary, as the politburo member responsible for cadre issues was behind this decision. Ghoghoberidze (1997), No. 27 accuses Gorbachev of having selected the non-Russian Shevardnadze to be a whipping boy for an unpopular foreign policy and making him dependent on Gorbachev by appointing his declared enemy to the position of first secretary of the CPG. Only after his spectacular resignation in 1990 did Shevardnadze begin to act independently.

25 More in detail in Gerber 1997, pp. 149-160.

cial tributes to him – he was even canonised by the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II – the CP secretary Patiashvili attempted in vain to win over the Georgian intelligentsia. A bomb attack on the grave of Chavchavadze’s Communist adversary, Filipp Makharadze, overshadowed the festivities. In December of that year, the informal Ilia Chavchavadze Society was founded on the initiative of freed dissidents. After intense personal attacks, the radical forces among the dissidents and youth movement asserted themselves in the board of directors. After the founding of the “Greens”, the national movement experienced wide-ranging organisational institutionalisation, also in the provinces. The first item on their list of demands stated that “the country of Georgia must belong to Georgians”. With this ethnically conceived conception of the nation, all non-Georgians were excluded and even the Abkhazians and Ossetians were at best given a status of cultural autonomy. There was a dream of a unified, homogenous nation-state.<sup>26</sup>

After the KGB broke up a memorial with roughly 20 participants for the victims of Stalinist terror on 24 December 1987, Patiashvili out of fear of further damaging his image, refused to let the KGB chairman Alexi Inauri, who had been in office for forty years, arrest the “informals”. Inauri later resigned under protest. Repression did not appear to be opportune.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the forces of reform from the intelligentsia and the party were successfully integrated into the semi-official Rustaveli Society, which was founded in March 1988, and thus “neutralised”. However, in terms of their programme, they detached themselves from the party after the “dissenting” literary critic Akaki Bakradze was elected party chairman in March 1989.<sup>28</sup>

The moderates of the society did not seek immediate independence, preferring to go through parliament to gradually attain a more comprehensive status of autonomy and democratic reforms through to a constitutional state, but they were also willing to collaborate with Soviet institutions. At first, they were able to keep the radicals from continuing on their uncompromising course towards independence. The latter reserved for themselves acts of national disobedience in order to drive the Soviet colonial power out of Georgia and dismantle their structures. As a result, they equally confronted Moscow and the local party elite provoking intense reactions from both. Communication between the party and the radical opposition or even cooperation between reform-oriented forces as in the Baltic States was impossible. In August 1988, the CPG attempted to take the wind out of the national movement’s sails by passing a “resolution on the state programme on the Georgian language” that lifted the Soviet bilingual language policy and made Georgian henceforward the sole offi-

26 For more on the society and the persons involved in its founding, see Gerber 1997, pp. 161-167. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who in 1978 revealed his “repentance epiphany” on national television, was only able to join thanks to the recommendation from the undisputed authority Merab Kostava. His own justification can be found in Gamsakhurdia 1988.

27 Ghoghoberidze 1997, No. 29.

28 The number of members rose from 30,000 in October 1988 to 150,000 in mid-1990 and acted as an umbrella organisation for mediating organisations between the party and the general public. Gerber 1997, pp. 168-170; Aves 1991, p. 10.

cial language, also in the autonomous oblasts. It thereby raised the fear of official and linguistic assimilation among the minorities.

In November 1988, having been excluded and left without any institutional political instruments of power, the radical opposition mobilised the masses, first of all pupils and students, and led them onto the streets. There were enough reasons to go around: the “Abkhazian Letter” to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Conference that reasserted the Abkhazians’ desire for secession and the changes to the Soviet constitution planed by Gorbachev that provided for expanded autonomy rights, but also the elimination of the Union republics’ right to secede. In this atmosphere, the radical wing of the national movement fought their way to the forefront of the political opposition. The radicals reacted with direct, symbolic acts such as hunger strikes and demonstrations in front of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, in which they mobilised at times over 100,000 people. Even workers from Rustavi and western Georgia declared their solidarity with the youth movement, while the CPG remained silent. Incapable of negotiating, Patiashvili sent the intelligentsia, which however sympathised in secret with the acts of resistance thus revealing a loyalty crisis within the CPG. Gorbachev ultimately gave in, thereby sealing the radicals’ success, which outshined the lack of internal unity after the Chavchavadze Society spilt into adversarial groups.<sup>29</sup>

As a new wave of protests began in early April 1989 with demands for independence drawing on the Abkhazians’ aspirations for secession, in the morning hours of 9 April 1989 a hunger strike protest in front of Parliament was violently broken up by military intervention with toxic gas. At least 20 people died and several hundreds were injured. The CPG, acting helplessly, was vilified once and for all, even though Russia was deemed responsible for the events and the anti-Russian sentiments intensified. The fact that there was no prosecution for those responsible led to a “discrediting of the entire value system in the national consciousness”. The feeling of defeat spread.<sup>30</sup>

The following months witnessed a “total collapse of state authority”,<sup>31</sup> which allowed the “informals” within the radical wing of the national movement to represent the interests of the Georgian people.<sup>32</sup> It was now up to the “informals” to fill up the political and institutional void. Without any corresponding experience or independent political and institutional structures, they were overwhelmed by the task of creat-

29 In an interview with Akaki Bakradze 1989 in November 1988; Ghoghoberidze 1997, No. 31, 33 and 37; Gerber 1997, pp. 170-176. Giorgi Ch’anturia, for example, had in the meantime founded his “National Democratic Party”, which led the hunger strike.

30 Among those responsible for the military intervention were, apart from the party leaders under Patiashvili, also General Igor Rodionov, leader of the Transcaucasian Military District of the Soviet Armed Forces, who in this role was also a member of the CC and the CPG. He suffered no detriment to his career. None of those involved has been held to account and prosecuted before a court of law. Gerber 1997, pp. 177-186; Ghoghoberidze 1997, No. 39, 41, 43, criticises the national movement’s policies as “romantic” and “gallant”, and “the ethno-psychological maximalism accustomed to Georgians, the lack of self-control and nervousness”.

31 Jones 1992a, p.78; see the documentary “9 *aprelja*” 1990.

32 Opinion polls in Molodëzh Gruzii from 7 October 1989.

ing new constitutional and democratic structures. This required concentrating on charismatic leading personalities and personalising dissent with marginalisation, division, moral rigour and radicalism as a consequence.

Traditional authorities in the history of Georgia and first of all the “millennia-long” national statehood, monarchy and the Georgian Orthodox Church, were to contribute to the societal consolidation and spiritual and moral renewal, as if the (also positive) effects of two centuries of “Russian foreign rule” could be wiped away so easily. Under Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, the Church resisted such attempts by the radicals to monopolise the situation, particularly as it strongly insisted on the non-use of force in the fight for independence. For example, on that fateful 9 April 1989, his calls for the demonstrators to disperse peacefully after prayer were not followed. Therefore, the mentioned institutions can be said to have rather a symbolic function in the eyes of the activists in the national movement.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from language and Christian belief, there was a general opinion that justified a particular claim to historical territory, which called the autonomous oblasts into question. The repatriation of Islamist, Georgian-born Meskhetians, deported under Stalin, was countermanded due to an allegedly “demographic crisis”.<sup>34</sup> The ethnic minorities increasingly felt threatened as they were in part reduced to status of “guests in Georgian territory”.<sup>35</sup> As a result of this, the emerging Abkhazian and Ossetian popular fronts sought support from Moscow. Armenians and Azeris were considered additional potential sources of conflict.<sup>36</sup> In this case, we are not dealing with “border disputes”,<sup>37</sup> but rather with conflicts over the political status of the

33 Due to Gamsakhurdia’s affinity to the Anthroposophists, he promised a “Georgian spiritual mission” that compensated for the vacuum of a materialistic ideology with a mystic-esoterically charged synthesis of orient and occident within Georgian Christianity. This idea is not very common in Georgia, however metaphysical thought can often be found among convinced followers of Gamsakhurdia, the ‘Zviadists’. The Anthroposophists are some of his main defenders in the West. Gamsakhurdia 1991, p. 22.

34 Gerber 1997, pp. 200-210; Gachechiladze 1995, pp. 183f.; Gelaschwili 1993, pp. 172-188. Shevardnadze also denied them citizenship and merely conceded a status as refugees, see Georgian Chronicle No.11, November 1997, p. 10.

35 Gamsakhurdia’s speech on 1 June 1990 in Kakheti provides an example of how ethnic minorities were used exploitatively in the domestic political debate concerning the prevailing common opinion within the national movement. Molodězh Gruzii No. 35, 7 September 1990, p. 5.

36 On the removal of South Ossetia’s autonomy status and the declaration of a state of emergency there as well as the founding of an interest group “Gejrat” in the town of Marneuli that represents Azeris living in Georgia, see Molodězh Gruzii No. 49, 14 December 1990, pp. 1, 2, 4; Gachechiladze 1995, pp. 174f.; cf. in Gelaschwili 1993, p. 34 on the perception of national minorities as “mines in the body of Georgia” by the national movement. In an empirical study on people of German descent in Georgia, Hammel 1995, pp. 118-131 shows, in the years 1989-1993, an increase of ethnic consciousness and consolidation as a reaction to increasing societal marginalisation and strongly deteriorating living conditions.

37 Gerber 1997, p. 116.



groups involved.<sup>38</sup> This also applies to the tensions between Tbilisi and the Adjarians, people of Georgian descent and converts to Islam, in the Adjarian Autonomous SSR.

Admonishing calls fell on deaf ears. However, they were instrumental in the interim phase between the old Republic leadership's fall from power and the abolition of the republic by Georgia's independence, as "constitutionalists",<sup>39</sup> that is, on the basis of the existing Soviet Republic constitution in the Supreme Soviet, on coming to terms with historical injustices towards Georgians, and on democratic draft laws and constitutional amendments. By the time free elections were held in October 1990, these calls had provoked the CP leadership and the Supreme Soviet to introduce reforms that could have taken Georgia on the "Baltic path". However, even they were not in a position to create a common institutional base of moderates as was shown in the beginning of 1990 by the break up of the 'Popular Front', having only been founded in June 1989.<sup>40</sup> In this phase all organisational connections from the party, professional and cultural associations to Moscow, were broken off, going so far as mass objection to serving in the military.

After the fatal car accident of the integrative dissident Merab Kostava in October 1989, the radicals also broke apart into individual groups and "parties" due to personal aspirations for dominance.<sup>41</sup> There was only agreement on boycotting the election of the Supreme Soviet, which was to bring an end to the vacuum of power. The common course of action was merely coordinated into a "national forum". By calling for alternative elections of a powerless national congress, they manoeuvred themselves into a blind alley as they were unable to make its purpose clear given the reform-minded Supreme Soviet and, moreover, they institutionally divided the national movement once and for all.<sup>42</sup> Eventually, only Zviad Gamsakhurdia<sup>43</sup> was willing to break from this obstructive stance at the beginning of May 1990 as he ran

38 The term "ethnic conflict" is correctly rejected by all parties involved in the conflict, as it was not a product of ethnic hatred. Cf. Ghia Nodia at the conference "Georgians and Abkhazians: The Search for a Settlement and the Role of the International Community" at Vrije Universiteit Brussels, 12-14 June 1997.

39 Among these groups were DASi (Democratic Elections for Georgia), Rustaveli-Society, People's Front of Georgia, the Green Party, the Republican-Federal or later Christian Democratic Party, Liberal-Democratic or later National-Liberal Party, moderate leftovers from the Chavchavadze Society and the political club with renowned representatives of the intelligentsia.

40 Gerber 1997, pp. 187-195; programme in the People's Front of Georgia (n.d.).

41 Among these were Giorgi Chanturia's National Democratic Party, Irakli Cereteli's the Party of National Independence, the Georgian Helsinki Union and the Society of St. Iliia the Righteous, with which Gamsakhurdia allegedly tried to create a new reservoir of supporters. Gerber 1997, pp. 195-200.

42 Symptomatic of this was the interview with the member of academia Merab Aleksidze from the central elections committee in *Molodëzh Gruzii* No. 35, 7 September 1990, p. 4.

43 As the son of a famous novelist Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, he changed from (1939-1993) dissident to the charismatic populist leader of the national movement and ultimately the first freely elected President of an independent Georgia.



for the Supreme Soviet as the lone radical with the electoral coalition “Round Table – Free Georgia”. His coalition was rewarded with 54 per cent of the vote and almost 2/3 of the representatives and he took over the government as chairman of the Supreme Council, which became an organ of the legislative branch and exposed the meaninglessness of the national congress. As such, an important part of the radical national movement had taken themselves out of play,<sup>44</sup> the elections of the Supreme Soviet in October 1990<sup>45</sup> however proved well enough the aspirations for independence among large segments of the population in the hopes of a rapid improvement to the catastrophic economic and social situation in the country.<sup>46</sup> In a study of the electorate, the “Round Table” voters were mainly from the middle and lower educated classes of the rural population, in other words the “province” neglected by the circles in Tbilisi. To them, Zviad Gamsakhurdia became the personified bearer of hope of national independence and economic prosperity.<sup>47</sup>

As the new government took power, a new open-ended “transitional period” began with the goal of completely restoring the independence of the state and, at the same time, pursuing a strategy of disengagement from Moscow with all available means. This was seen in several resolutions that were symbolic in nature (renaming the country the Republic of Georgia, reintroducing the national flag from 1918 and introduction of a new national anthem).<sup>48</sup> The negotiations on a new treaty of union were demonstratively ignored,<sup>49</sup> and the Soviet troops in Georgia were declared “occupation troops”. An additional “priority task” was the “re-establishment of Georgia’s territorial integrity”,<sup>50</sup> after South Ossetia had unilaterally declared itself an independent “Democratic Soviet Republic” in September 1990. Therefore, one of the initial decisions to be made by the new parliament was the unanimous removal of South Ossetia’s autonomy status. A state of emergency was declared the very next day. The hostilities escalated into a military conflict and, as a result, the independence movement was discredited. In foreign policy matters, the Gamsakhurdia government remained largely isolated and without any international recognition.

In place of the boycotted referendum on the Soviet Union, Georgia conducted its own plebiscite on re-establishing independence in March 1991. 98 per cent voted in support of Georgia’s declaration of independence on 9 April 1991 (!). However, as

44 The names of the 200 elected members of the National Congress can be found in *Molodězh Gruzii* No. 44, 9 November 1990, pp. 6, 8.

45 On the discussion of new election laws in the lead up to the first multiple-party elections in the history of the USSR see for ex. Khmaladze 1990; on the elections, see Gerber 1997, pp. 210-213.

46 Given the largely identical demands for a market economy, rule of law, democratic liberties and the strengthening of the Georgian language by simply meagre concepts for its fulfilment, we can hardly refer to this as a pluralism of opinions. Jones 1995.

47 Nelson/Amonashvili 1992.

48 Documents in: *Molodězh Gruzii* No. 45, 16 November 1990, pp. 2-3.

49 See the letter from the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia 1990b to Gorbachev.

50 *The Georgian Messenger* 1/1991.

early as June of that year there were problems with regulating citizenship, which was to be determined by a loosely defined “vow of fidelity”, knowledge of the Georgian language as well as ten years of residence in the country. Because both the government and parliament feared the country would be sold off to ethnic minorities through the privatisation of land and state-owned enterprise, this amounted to a self-blockade of reforms despite the economic and energy crises. Ultimately, Gamsakhurdia lapsed into a form of state paternalism, which, after rejecting capitalism and communism, he praised as the “third path” to “state capitalism”.

The Round Table did not have to fear an opposition in Parliament made up of representatives of the People’s Front or the CPG and was able to vote through all of their draft laws. The integration of former high-ranking members of the old nomenklatura into the authorities and government apparatus despite an anti-communist policy rendered the CPG meaningless. After initial cooperation with moderate and radical groups, the government increasingly refused to include the (extra-parliamentary) opposition and the broad group of the old elite, established in the capital, in the political process. They passed on establishing a generally binding political code of conduct and institutions.<sup>51</sup>

After Gamsakhurdia was elected President of the Republic of Georgia in May 1991 with 86.5 per cent of the vote, the extremes gradually came to a head. He filled all the essential posts with close members of his party and mobilised the underprivileged rural population against the intelligentsia protesting in Tbilisi, who were subsequently labelled as the “public enemies”. In response, students chanting in the streets referred to him as “Ceașescu”. However, his mistrustfulness was even felt by his closest confidants and this alienated parts of the young National Guard and security organisations. He thus personally failed to overcome competing allegiances by striving for national unification in politics.<sup>52</sup> This attempt led to a public atmosphere of national parochialism or even “autism”, in which several of his supporters placed the “nation” as a value before “truth”. The media were controlled more and more and liberal organisations were villainised as “cosmopolitan” and subsequently dissolved.

Nodia emphasises that in this first failed attempt at building a nation-state, Gamsakhurdia “tried to abide by political norms for quite a long time”,<sup>53</sup> as this had been part of the Western model unparalleled in post-Soviet societies, yet one that was compatible with the authoritarian elements within the Soviet heritage of political culture. Given the particular personality of Gamsakhurdia, this proved to be especially effective. Forms of democracy (elections, constitution, diverse political par-

51 For an analysis of the Gamsakhurdia populism, see Jones 1994. His conclusion: “The support for Gamsakhurdia did represent a revolt against the liberal technocratic elite of the Georgian establishment, but as so often happens, degenerated into a different sort of elitism. (...) the scapegoating of Non-Georgian minorities and the emphasis on unity undermined participation and political diversity.” (pp. 141f.); cf. also Gerber 1997, pp. 210-223.

52 Köhler 1995, p. 10.

53 Nodia 1997, p.4.

ties, and rule of law) were understood, however the procedures (tolerance, balance, power sharing, opposition) were not.<sup>54</sup>

Without either a conceptional or personal alternative, the quarrelling opposition had few political opportunities to rebel against the charismatic president. They saw Gamsakhurdia's reluctance to condemn the putschists in Moscow in August 1991 as reason enough to accuse him of cooperating with the very reactionary groups in Russia that people sought to distance themselves from. In order to avoid a Soviet invasion, after conferring with generals of the Transcaucasian Military District Gamsakhurdia in fact dissolved the young National Guard as a separate entity and placed them under the control of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs. This was seen by some in the army and opposition as a form of concession to the putschists, and as a consequence the commanding officer of the National Guard, Tengiz Kitovani, Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua and Foreign Minister Khoshtaria defied his orders and crossed over to the opposition. On 2 September, 20 people were wounded, some severely, as a demonstration was dispersed, and this, in turn, brought the loyalty crisis among the general public to a head. A live broadcast of the parliamentary debates on this event was dubiously forbidden, causing an additional 39 representatives to join the opposition. Calls came for Gamsakhurdia's resignation, and he subsequently seized more and more competencies of state power; the ministries of internal affairs, foreign affairs, defence and justice, the intelligence agency and the cabinet of ministers were all placed under direct control of the president. Oppositional leaders of the national movement such as Giorgi Chanturia and others were arrested. At the end of September, Kitovani's rebelling National Guard occupied the television broadcasting centre. Gamsakhurdia created a "National Security Council" and declared a state of emergency in the capital. Representatives of the Popular Front and the Democratic Georgia bloc formed the Democratic Centre, a parliamentary opposition that was to become the Democratic Movement of Georgia, consisting of a coalition of moderate parties, in October 1991. Even the Church was unable to mediate between the feuding parties.

The power struggle continued on the streets, where *Zviadists*, supporters of the president, and adolescent oppositionists faced off. In the end, a coalition of former staff members of the president, representatives of the dispossessed old nomenklatura, the European-oriented intelligentsia in Tbilisi and the youth movement waited for Gamsakhurdia's (voluntary) resignation. Units of the National Guard under Tengiz Kitovani and the paramilitary *mkhedrioni* (knights)<sup>55</sup> under the criminal Jaba Ioseliani brought this stalemate to an end in the name of "democracy" (that is, against Gamsakhurdia), as they forced the first freely elected President of Georgia out of office in the so-called "winter war", a series of bloody battles in the city cen-

54 Jones 1994, pp. 136.

55 A self-description can be found in *Mchedrioni* 1991.

tre, from 22 December 1991 to 6 January 1992.<sup>56</sup> Despite the rhetoric of unity, Gamsakhurdia's polarising policies and his violent removal from office exposed the deep divisions that permeated Georgian society. In Chechnya's President Dzhokhar Dudayev, he found asylum and military support in the fight against the new ruling powers in Tbilisi.<sup>57</sup>

##### 5 *The second Shevardnadze era (from 1992)*

What followed was the complete collapse of any state order and the ensuing civil war in the divided country. Gamsakhurdia, now in exile in Chechnya, was still supported in his native region Mingrelia in western Georgia in opposition to the "council of war" in power in Tbilisi. The members of the council of war, the former Prime Minister Sigua and the warlords Ioseliani and Kitovani, discredited both domestically and internationally, accepted the former chairman of the CP, Eduard Shevardnadze, having just previously returned to Georgia, as its newest member in March 1992. Once again, he was to manoeuvre the country away out of the dead-end that was the one-dimensional course towards independence by using previously neglected political and economic reforms. As an internationally recognised symbol and new bearer of hope for the people of Georgia, he obtained the recognition of Georgia's independence by Germany and the USA in May 1992. International isolation had been lifted; the path laid out to becoming a subject of international law in the UN and OSCE. Shevardnadze was forced to recognise later that the West's willingness to help the former Foreign Minister of the USSR had its limits. A return to the former USSR's sphere of influence was tacitly condoned.

At first, Shevardnadze remained powerless in domestic policy matters. The state monopoly on legitimate violence had been "privatised" and armed private militias roamed the country; the informal organisation between power and violence became obvious.<sup>58</sup> Public order, the economy and energy supplies reached rock bottom. As Shevardnadze closed in on a political compromise in negotiations with South Os-

56 Gerber 1997, p. 225 establishes the deep division felt among the general public in their loyalty to the president as a symbolic figure of Georgian independence on the one hand and Gamsakhurdia's authoritarian leadership style on the other hand. For more detail, see Bluashvili 1994.

57 Gerber 1997, p. 227. From a Western, national perspective it may seem as a paradox that at the same time as Gamsakhurdia's 12-month long stay in Grozny, Chechens were fighting under Bassaev in Abkhazia for their independence against Georgian groups. The "pressure to assimilate through formal, global order criteria" makes the nation-state perspective into a necessary self-portrayal of the elite in fledgling nation-states, as it confirms the common pattern in the Western outsider's perception of reducing of complex social structures. The author supports the thesis that also in Georgia "nationality is for many people still just a situational identity with others on equal footing" (Köhler 1995, p. 10).

58 Köhler 1994, p. 17; Targamadze 1997.

setia in May/ June,<sup>59</sup> the conflict escalated surrounding the independence of Abkhazia. With the unauthorised invasion of Ioseliani's and Kitovani's troops into Sukhumi, Abkhazia's administrative centre, in summer 1992 an all-out war ensued that ended when Abkhazian troops captured the city in September 1993. As a result, roughly 250,000 Georgians fled from Abkhazia.<sup>60</sup> The threat of the country's collapse could now only be stopped with Georgia's entry into the CIS, which once again meant recognising Russia's supremacy and allowing a Russian military presence in the country. This is a price Shevardnadze had to pay. From one day to the next, Soviet troops stationed in Georgia were activated to the benefit of Shevardnadze and they brought a halt to the oncoming Zivadist offensive from Western Georgia towards Tbilisi. After the offensive failed, their leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, died under unclear circumstances in Mingrelia in December 1993.<sup>61</sup> After the signing of a Russian-Georgian friendship treaty in February 1994 along with several other agreements, Georgia's integration into the Russian Federation was complete. With the help of the federation, Shevardnadze was now able to seek a peaceful solution with Abkhazia through negotiations. An official truce was signed in May 1994.<sup>62</sup>

Gerber considers the national movement responsible for this "political mess", which led to this step backwards and placed the fate of their own nation in the hands of the Russians.<sup>63</sup> Shevardnadze took upon himself the onerous burden of this illegitimate birth of the "third republic" along with its consequences, which earned him the fiercest of criticisms from the radical nationalists. Nonetheless, in the parliamentary elections in October 1992 he was elected president of Parliament with 95.6 per cent of the vote, as the interim national council rejected a presidential republic, and thus the upheaval was legitimised after the fact.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike his predecessor, the new "head of state" (his official title until November 1995) had the political capacity to reach compromises and create coalitions with varying partners. In this way, he was gradually able to deactivate the criminal warlords and their paramilitary groups and, at the same time, consolidate the state and his power over it with the help of former confidants, the old intelligentsia and ambitious young forces.<sup>65</sup> However, during this time there were over 20 politically-

59 He provided for a special status in the relations between the Zchinvali region, the former South Ossetia Autonomous Region, and the Republic of North Ossetia while preserving Georgia's territorial integrity. More detailed in Dehdashti 2000. See also HDR 1997, p. 44.

60 Details in Gelaschwili 1993 and Chervonnaya 1993.

61 It is still today unclear whether or not he was killed or committed suicide. Gerber 1997, p. 62, note 3; for general information, see Halbach 1994, 21, pp. 18-21.

62 Manutscharjan 1996; Gerber 1997, pp. 236-241; HDR 1996, pp. 22-27; HDR 1997, pp. 44-45.

63 Gerber 1997, p. 228.

64 Detailed election results in Gerber 1992b.

65 He ruled Parliament with the support of the electoral coalition "Peace" from the old *nomenklatura* and the bloc "Unity", made up of moderate parties, the Greens and National Democrats.

motivated attacks on figures in both the government and opposition.<sup>66</sup> Shortly before the new constitution was signed in August 1995, the failed assassination on Shevardnadze signalled the climax of politically-motivated violence and proved that it was time to proceed with determination after three years of cautious strategies. Due to his alleged involvement in the assassination attempt, Ioseliani was arrested and his military coalition was dissolved once and for all. The chairman of the state intelligence agency and son of the head of a Stalinist splinter party, Igor Giorgadze, avoided arrest by fleeing to Moscow. State authority was established once again and the path to wide-ranging reforms was finally cleared. Life became gradually more civilised. Given the domestic political chaos, the internal quarrelling and the Parliament's incapability to reform, the executive office concentrated on the Shevardnadze apparatus, a kind of new CC in which the "White Fox", as he was nicknamed, ruled by decree behind closed doors. There was a lack of transparency, what used to be called "*glasnost*"', in decision-making processes, as well as no explicit reform programme. The driving forces for reform were rather the World Bank and the IMF, which only approve loans for concrete reform projects such as price liberalisation.

Even though Shevardnadze clearly set himself apart from Gamsakhurdia's chauvinism and all residents were assured of citizenship<sup>67</sup> in the "Law on Georgian Citizenship" from March 1993, in 1994 there were still no signs of the reintegration of minorities into socio-political life. This was made clear not only in the continued dominance of Georgians in key positions but also in the lack of a concrete minority policy. Their problems were either denied or subordinated to state consolidation. The uncertain conditions of existence forced in particular non-Georgian ethnic groups, e.g. Russians among others, to emigrate or at least plan to do so.<sup>68</sup>

After the constitution was passed at the end of August 1995 and the ensuing presidential and parliamentary elections in November,<sup>69</sup> Shevardnadze's consolidation of power in a presidential republic seemed to be complete. He appeared to be positioned above the parties as his government is made up of representatives of various groups and none from the "Citizen's Union", with which he was closely af-

66 Of particular mention should be the leader of the National-Democratic Party, Giorgi Chanturia, who was considered to be Shevardnadze's potential successor and who had promised to fight the criminal machinations of the state apparatus such as the warlords Ioseliani and Kitovani. Then there is Shevardnadze's confidant, Soliko Khabeishvili, who as negotiator with the IMF and World Bank was of major importance for the political and economic reform process. Gerber 1997, pp. 229-236.

67 Gachechiladze 1995, p. 170; *Svobodnaja Gruzija*, 31 March 1993.

68 Hammel 1995, pp. 110-111; Svanidze 1994. Many Ossetians immigrated to the Republic of North Ossetia of the Russian Federation. Scant insights are provided in HDR 1995, pp. 39-40; for 1996 only the development goal of a "pluralistic, but integrated society in the sense of ensuring peace and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities" (p. 128) was mentioned. A better account is given in Gachechiladze 1995, pp. 169-184.

69 Candidates and Parties in Elections in Georgia 1995.

filiated.<sup>70</sup> Shevardnadze's role as a guarantor of stability was unrivalled and unparalleled.<sup>71</sup>

The constitution moved Georgia away from a unitarist central state to a federal structure of the country, while Abkhazia and Adjara were granted a status of autonomy that was to be defined more clearly at a later date. After negative experiences with a dysfunctional parliamentarism, there was a change to a presidential regime based on the American model with a two-house system: Parliament and the Senate as an organ of self-administrative public bodies in Georgia. The latter would have been established once there was a lasting solution to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts. For the first time, civil liberty claims could be individually brought before the constitutional court, for which however a sense of right or wrong had not yet evolved enough.<sup>72</sup>

Of the 54 parties in the parliamentary elections in 1995, only three were able to exceed the five per cent hurdle. The "Citizen's Union of Georgia", which was held together less by its programme than its loyalty to Shevardnadze and the anticipated safeguarding of one's status, made up the strongest group with 23.7 per cent or 108 out of 233 seats in the new Parliament. Among its representatives there were members of the old artistic and academic elite, the state and economic administration or directors of privatised companies and a handful of young specialists from the Greens, a member of which is Zurab Zhvania, who as Speaker of Parliament was the second most powerful man in the country. The "Union for Georgia's Rebirth", led by party of the former leader of the Ajarian Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze, unexpectedly won 6.8 per cent of the vote as the third-strongest power becoming a regional party in Parliament. He ruled over the Muslim Georgians in that region like a "pasha" and, with his paternalistic leadership style, he was ideal for many Georgians accustomed to authority. At least he was able to prevent any military conflicts in his region. At the same time, the Ajarian Autonomous Republic presented a perfect example of how the hitherto elite maintaining control of the former Soviet autonomous institutions, beholden with privileges, could be a significant cause for conflicts. The fact that Shevardnadze and the central powers in Moscow recognised Adjara, offered an example for the basis of cooperation between the centre and periphery. However, in this case, the aspirations focused on securing autonomy and not secession.<sup>73</sup>

From October 1992 until the parliamentary elections, Parliament had been the place where the quarrelling opposition could let off steam. After the November elec-

70 Zurabishvili 1996.

71 Cf. Nodia 1997; HDR 1996, p. 39f.; this can be seen in foreign policy matters as well by his critical comments on the Russian speech on broken promises in the Abkhazian conflict at the CIS conference in Chişinău in October 1997, Rotar 1997.

72 HDR 1996, pp. 27f., 137-147 (English version); HDR 1997, p. 38; cf. the discussion on the state structure in Opyt (1996).

73 In this case the local elite were unable to apply the title "ethnic tensions" to their interests. Gachechiladze 1995, p. 171; a "separatist" opinion is provided by Bekirishvili 1995.



tions of 1995, however, they seemed to run out of it. The most radical parties, but also many moderate groups were forced out, ending up on the street, back to where they were in 1988. In the newly-elected Parliament, the oppositional anti-communist groups were now only represented by the National Democrats, who in the meantime had become moderate-conservative, with 7.9 per cent of the vote. Apart from a group of directly-elected candidates, these three electoral groups received about 40 per cent of all the votes cast. With voter participation at 68 per cent, they represent only 26 per cent of all eligible voters.

The quarrelling opposition, now extra-parliamentary, had to secure wide support from the population and abstain from their symbolic and direct actions from the perestroika-era and conduct more conceptual work. Now powerless and without any social support, the rest of the national movement neutralised themselves through internal bickering. Almost all of their prominent representatives have died from unnatural causes. Not one single death has been clarified.

The masses followed this process on state television like spectators behind the fence. They were concerned with the vital question of securing their livelihoods. The consciousness and will to partake in the political transformation process had been masked by the euphoria surrounding national independence and soon had completely disappeared. A pre-political, cultural national identity was significant for them, which can also be seen in the famed self-image of tolerance. In an USIA opinion poll conducted in 1993, 51 to 67 per cent of those asked agreed that national minorities should have the right to found their own organisations, publish books, attend school and masses in their native language and send representatives to parliament in order to maintain their traditions and culture. Only 22 to 36 per cent opposed such minority rights. In contrast to the nationalist opinion leaders the willingness to recognise minorities appeared to have grown after the experiences of the Abkhazian War, as long as they did not challenge the territorial integrity of Georgia.<sup>74</sup>

As the population is politically inexperienced in self-organisation and articulation of their interests, paternalistic and authoritarian notions of the state continue to exist. Whereas on the one hand they are wary of all public institutions, state authorities, parties and banks, on the flip side they naively project all their hope onto one person as head of state, who is supposed to solve all their problems. The former standard bearers of the national movement, the “new middle classes” in Tbilisi, were threatened with poverty and social decline. At the same time, the presence of Georgian refugees from Abkhazia in Tbilisi urged a quick solution to the Abkhazian conflict as these increasingly show their willingness even for a military solution.

The division in society between “privileged officials” and the powerless masses, between Tbilisi and the “province”, and between rich and poor presented profound reasons for the continuing instability of the new political structures. This division was concealed by an even more dramatic rhetoric of national unity, which had how-

74 Gachechiladze 1995, p. 175; Abaishvili 1997, pp. 22-26 calls for a change from an ethnic to a citizen's nation in a multi-ethnic state like Georgia.



ever not resulted in more trust in state institutions and political actors. Instead, there was a rather “paradoxical” interaction between the effectivity of politics expected by the people and its legitimacy; one cannot be achieved without the other, and there is a lack of both. Political stability, material affluence and secure livelihoods were more important to the Georgian people than democracy, personal liberties and confirming their own nation. The majority of the population swayed between the old and the new; they were prepared to change themselves in favour of the new “if the latter is to prove its supremacy in real life”.<sup>75</sup> However, given the economic crisis, the promises of the market economy cannot take effect if it is apparently only used by unscrupulous business men, corrupt politicians and criminals. There was a general awareness that the privatisation of the country and industry would more likely take away jobs than actually create them.<sup>76</sup> The elite wanted a market economy, in order to present themselves as part of Europe, but not necessarily the inherent consequences that come with it. In Georgia, competition and choice (selection), the weapons of voters and consumers, appeared to be extinguished within a network of conflicting collective obligations and dependencies. At the same time, these offered protection and help from friends, relatives and “bosses”, which the state could not offer. It remains to be seen whether the individual will manage to break out of the patronage-clientele relationship and allow himself to become a self-sufficient person who acts under his own authority and who enters into a “civil society”. This is probably a dimension of the crisis of modernity taking place since the 1970s, which was answered under Soviet conditions with a backwards concept of the nation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Moral rigour, mutual accusations and extremely symbolic gestures continue to dominate, all of which could needlessly bring the conflict to a head.<sup>77</sup> It is probable that in this process of change, the conflicts' intensity has its roots in a feeling of helplessness in the face of an underlying identity crisis concerning the idea of the national character; this helplessness has hardly been discussed in public. A crucial concept for the “second” national movement in the 19th century, namely that of Chavchavadze, which was used during the Soviet isolation to conjure up the “glorious past”, salvation by national traditions and the unity of all (supposedly ethnic) Georgians from pre-history to the Middle Ages through to the present,<sup>78</sup> could not keep up with the demands of an international pressure to modernise. The concept of a “civil society” was popular only among a small number of philosophers in the

75 Papia 1997, p. 20; considerably more sceptical HDR 1997; see also Staniszkis 1991, pp. 327ff.

76 Current overview in GET 1997 and the HDRs 1995-1997.

77 A “list of deficiencies” can be found in HDR 1997, pp. 32-33.

78 Qurashvili 1991; Vashak'idze/ P'aich'adze 1990; Gordeziani 1993.

1980s.<sup>79</sup> The “parochial” basic structure of Georgia’s own political culture, that is, the orientation only on personal surroundings instead of a central political system, was not considered to be a problem. On the contrary, it allowed the infiltration of foreign strategies of domination and a “privatised” form of autonomy. All negative things, for example the “paternalistic” and authoritarian traits, were able to be traced back to Russian or Soviet influence. However, by achieving independence, Georgia took on the responsibility for its own development in the modern world and – consciously or not – compelled itself to modernise its national institutions. The difficult experiences of the failed “second republic” with “national regression”,<sup>80</sup> civil war, ethnic conflicts and economic decline still run deep. Many Georgians feel they are in a state of “catharsis”,<sup>81</sup> after “Georgianness” in its metaphysical exaggeration shattered against reality. The euphoria of independence has been followed by the hesitant search for their own responsibility in the reasons for its failure.

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79 Cf. Mamardashvili (1990). For the philosopher, it was not enough to affirm an “independent Georgia” in words alone. In his eyes, the path “from slavery to freedom” lies in pondering what each individual Georgian would want for his children. “The fight must not be for the characteristics of the nation, rather for the freedom of its people.” There were intense reactions to his criticism of Gamsakhurdia (Salija, 1990). See also Nodia 1995a; Kikodze 1996; Piralishvili 1994; Gogsadze 1995.

80 HDR 1997, p. 1.

81 Topuria 1994, p. 14.

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