Russia – Georgia Relations: Brief History and Political Timeline

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Russian Federation-Georgia Relations: Timeline and Brief Historical Context

This report is prepared in order to summarize the relations, give a brief political history by examining key actors and events between the Russian Federation and Georgia. References and disclaimer are settled at the end of the report.

This timeline covers the period from 31 March 1991 to 2021 of Georgia, which declared its independence shortly before the dissolution of the USSR. The South Caucasus Region, where Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are located, is a gateway to Central Asia for the USSR. As Mackinder's "Black Domination Theory" and Spykman's "Edge Belt Theory" mentioned, the one who dominates this region gains the power to dominate Asia and then the whole world. (Sapmaz, 2008)

This region, which has geopolitical, security, military and economic importance, has been in dispute with Russia many times during the historical process compared to Turkey, which is its border neighbor. In order to understand the events between Russia and Georgia, it is necessary to remember the events of the two countries in their past. Having been under the domination of many empires such as the Ottoman, Seljuk, Mongols and Persians, Georgia lost its independence in 1783 as a result of an agreement it signed with the Russian Empire after the events with its neighbors. The protective attitude of the Russian Tsarism towards Georgia has turned into an understanding of hegemony over time and the Russification Policy has been implemented in the region. (Kanbolat, 2020)

World War I and After (1918-1991)

The joy of Georgia, which gained independence with the help of the Germans on May 26, 1918, was short. In February 1921, the Red Army entered the Caucasus territory. In 1922, the South Caucasus Soviet Federation, including Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, was established. The center of the federation has been chosen as Tbilisi. (Shantadze, 2006)

1936

The federation dissolved and three countries received the status of the Federated Soviet Republic. Georgia had a very comfortable period during the reign of Joseph Stalin. Nikita Khrushchev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who succeeded Stalin, started provocation by the Georgian people when she wanted to remove the statues of Stalin. With the demand of "Independent
Georgia", Russian Special Units opened fire on the crowd in response to this demand. According to the allegations, over 200 bodies were thrown into the Kura River. (Neef) Adopting the idea that each individual belongs to a single class, the Soviet Government ignored the languages of all peoples and accepted the only official language as Russian. Georgia reacted to this, and after the actions taken, Georgian was the second official language of the country after Russian.

1980s

With the "Glasnost and Perestroika" movement, which was the mastermind of the last Secretary General of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, the idea of independence in Georgia re-emerged. On April 9, 1989, Russian Special Units intervened the Georgians with weapons, and 21 people died. The struggle for independence continued under the leadership of the "Mrgvali Magida" "Round Table" (მრგვალი მაგიდა) party movement of Zviad Gamsahurdia, the first president of Georgia. (Shantadze, 2006)

Independent Georgia and the Russian Federation

A referendum was held on 31 March 1991; On April 9, 1991, Georgia declared its independence. Regarded as a great loss for Russia, the Georgian lands have been an important port place held by Russia for the purpose of reaching the warm seas throughout history. The Novorosisk Port, which Georgia has left in the hands of Russia, which includes the cities of Odessa and Batumi, poses a threat to Russia in maritime trade. Georgia has always had the support of Turkey against this threat by establishing a warm neighborly relationship with Turkey. The Republic of Turkey became the first country to recognize Georgia after declaring its independence. In the conflicts Georgia had with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Turkey did not recognize the independence of the separated regions, saying that it recognizes the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia has not withdrawn its support especially from South Ossetia in this regard. Because it was more sensitive to the most important point that provides its land connection with Armenia, which is considered its ally. Russia's attitude towards Georgia is generally similar to its relations with all former Soviet countries. Taking a negative attitude towards NATO membership, Russia does not want to lose its hegemony in these geopolitical and geostrategic regions, unwittingly countries such as the United States and Turkey. At the same time, Russia does not support the creation of a threat to itself in the region due to the richness of underground resources in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

1992 – The religious and extreme nationalist discourses of Georgia's first president, Zviad Gamsahurdia, exacerbated the conflicts between the people. He was dismissed from his office as a result of a military coup on January 6 with the label of a fascist dictator. Russia has accelerated ethnic conflicts in order to regain its power in the region. On September 3, Abkhazia declared war on Georgia. An agreement was signed with Russia to stop the war. However, the conflict has been re-established. (Mirzayeva)

1993 - Eduard Shevardnadze, General Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, took over. He requested assistance from Russia in order to ensure the integrity of the country. Georgia became a member of CIS. It allowed Russian bases to be located on its territory. Georgia lost its war with Abkhazia. (Shantadze, 2006)
1994 - The Abkhazia-Georgia meetings, which took place under the auspices of the UN, signed a peaceful declaration, but no permanent solution emerged. (Shantadze, 2006)

1995 – By stating that the oil pipeline will run through Georgia-Turkey, not Moscow, the USA has put Russia's savings on energy resources behind. (Ağacan, 2001)

1997 – With the visit to the USA, Georgia has taken steps towards becoming a member of NATO. (Shantadze, 2006)

1999 – During the Chechen-Russian War, the migration of the refugees from the Pankisi Valley to Georgia and the claims that Georgia helped Chechnya negatively affected the relations with Russia. (Ağacan, 2000)

2002 – Georgia has officially applied to NATO. Russia has expressed its discomfort against this situation in the name of its air safety. (Baev, 1997)

2003 Rose Revolution

Georgia has become a poor country as a result of corruption, bribery, and the poor economy during the Eduard Shevardnadze period. Independence struggles in Adjara, South Ossetia and Abkhazia put the country in a difficult situation. The failure of the administration to produce a solution to all these events raised voices of the Georgian people. After the parliamentary elections held on November 2, 2003 and the debates on Miheil Saakashvili's "United National Movement", Shevardnadze resigned from his post on November 22nd. Saakashvili stated that he would resolve the separatist movements before coming to power. (Kodaman & İren, 2013)

2004 – In the presidential election held in January, Saakashvili was elected president with 96% of the vote. (Demirağ, 2005)

2005 – In March, the Georgian Parliament approved a decree to evacuate Russia's active military bases on Georgian territory by January 1, 2006. Russia declared that it needs at least four years and 300 million dollars. (Shantadze, 2006)

2006 – With the signing of the Sochi Accord, on 31 December 2007, Russia said that it would evacuate the military bases. (Ertan, 2006)

2008 Russian-Georgian War

Russia has supported the ethnic conflicts taking place in Georgia. Abkhazia was involved in this war, also known as the South Ossetian War. Tshinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, was badly damaged after the conflict. Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During the negotiations held in Cenavo, the UN suggested reconciliation, but no result was achieved. (Erkan, 2016)


2011 – A trade agreement was signed between Georgia and Russia, which paved the way for Russia to join the World Trade Organization. (2011)

2012 – Giorgi Margvelashvili, leader of the opposition party, was declared President of Georgia to facilitate the transition to parliamentary system. (2021)
2014 – Georgia, which did not boycott the Sochi Winter Olympics; It has announced that Georgia will not have control of its customs and borders in the transition from Russia to Abkhazia against possible problems. (2014).

2015 – Georgia accused Russia of trying to annex South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the separatist regions, to its own state, of the “Alliance and Integration” agreements. (2015)

2017 – In the debate on state borders, Russia advanced fence and border signs up to a hundred meters into Georgia. (2017)

2018 – The first woman President Salome Zurabishvili took office in Georgia. Opposition supporters reacted strongly to this incident. There were protests across the country. (Gündüz, 2018)

2019 – After the visit of a Russian parliamentarian to Georgia, the first warm contact between the two countries took place in 11 years. Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili stated that Russia is responsible for the protests in the country. (Günüaydın & Sade, 2019)

2020 – Georgia has called on Russia to withdraw from the territories it has occupied for years in violation of Human Rights. (AA, 2020)

2021 – Georgia stated that in the tensions between Ukraine and Russia, Russia is the occupying force and recognizes the territorial integrity of Ukraine. (2021)


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