

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

WARS THAT DID NOT HAPPEN:
CASES OF JAVAKHK, KVEMO KARTLI AND AJARIA

A MASTER ESSAY SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
FOR PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS

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JUNE 2012

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ACNOLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my faculty advisor, Dr. Vahram Ter-Matevosyan for providing me with guidance, support and encouragement in the process of writing this essay. His advice and contribution has been very valuable while working on the essay. I am thankful to my Faculty Advisor for his readiness to provide necessary information regarding the topic.

I am very grateful to all the faculty members of Political Science and International Affairs for providing with the stimulus, appropriate knowledge and skills while the years of study at the American University of Armenia.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Dean of the Graduate School of Political Science and International Affairs, Dr. Douglas Shumavon for assisting us during the process of our study at American University of Armenia.

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Abstract

The purpose of the this Master's Essay is to study the factors which appeased ethnic conflicts in Javakhk and Kvemo Kartli after Georgia's independence in 1991, thus those conflicts never turned into a war. The research also incorporates the conflict of Ajaria in the same time frame, discussing it from the point of view of religious base as one of the components of ethnicity.

The essay provides theoretical background for the study of the ethnicity from the primordialist and constructivist perspectives and ethnicity-as-conflictual theories which give a comprehensive notion about the nature of ethnic conflicts and ethnicity in general. The study also refers to the current development in Georgia regarding ethnic minorities in Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria and investigate whether there have been any incentives for the conflicts to escalate since the Rose Revolution 2003.

Introduction

Disintegration of the Soviet Union radically altered political map of the world. The newly independent states faced the unknown challenges of statehood, sovereignty which brought to redistribution of political power and to an increase of conflictual elements and wars around the world. Ethnicity in no time became a number one issue for newly independent states. And the wars that erupted after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were mostly ethnic conflicts. However, there are a number of ethnic elements which are problematic by their nature and carry some portion of menace in them but they do not escalate up to the point of war and remain more or less stable.

For the research of this Master's Essay three ethnic conflicts are regarded after the Soviet Union's dissolution when former Soviet countries got independence. The study refers to the period of Georgia's independence on April 9, 1991 when two wars have been observed on the territory of the country: Abkhazia and South Ossetia and different tension in other parts of newly independent state. Thus the essay examines the conflicts of Javakhk,¹ Kvemo Kartli² and Ajaria.

Georgia contained five compactly settled minorities, three of which were autonomous at independence. Among its five compactly settled minorities, the Ajarians, South Ossetians, and Abkhazians held autonomous areas since the 1920s, whereas the Armenians and Azerbaijanis never had any territorial autonomy. Between the late Soviet era and the present, armed conflict occurred in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ajaria has maintained a high level of autonomy, involving an occasionally high level of *political* but not *armed* conflict with the government of Georgia. The Armenian minority in the Javakhk region has occasionally

¹ Throughout the paper mostly the name Javakhk is used referring to the region of Georgia where ethnic Armenians live. The region has been part of Samtskhe-Javakheti region since 1994.

² Throughout the paper for the name Kvemo Kartli, the name Borchalo is also used referring to the region of Georgia which is now mostly populated by the Azerbaijanis.

expressed dissatisfaction with its situation, but has not seen any major ethnic mobilization. Finally, the Azerbaijani minority has been almost quiet during the period from 1991 to 2000.³

In the part 1 the key concepts are presented necessary for the analysis of the three conflicts emerged and soon settled down. Thus, the stages of conflict are illustrated and discussed within the context of the emerged conflicts in Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria. The factor of ethnicity alongside with other factors which may have a probable influence towards the developments in those regions are observed. The part also discusses theoretical frameworks in regards to ethnic identity of Georgian minorities and also discusses the limitations of the provided theories. Part 2 studies separately the cases of Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria and presents internal and external aspects that might have a probable impact on the conflictual elements to erupt in the mentioned regions after Georgia's independence. The essay also studies the factors for the tensions to appease, and not turn into a war. Part 3 illustrates the present situation of minorities living in Georgia referring to the events after the Revolution of Roses in 2003 and study the current dynamics observed in the regions of Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria. This section also refers to the current policy of integration adopted by the Georgian government.

The study will address the following research questions:

1. Why during the early 1990s there were *no violent conflicts in Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria?*
2. What were *the incentives of de-escalation of ethnic conflicts in Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria?*
3. Have there been *any incentives for the conflicts to escalate since the Rose Revolution 2003?*

And the hypothesis for the Master's Essay is the following:

³ Svante Cornell E., *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict: Experiences from the Caucasus* (2002), pp. 2-7.

Ethnic wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the beginning of 1990s were not a sufficient incentive for other ethnically conflictual elements to erupt.

Literature Review

Generally ethnic identity tends to reproduce itself as a means for group competition, for identity and resources. Such extended self-reproduction becomes the reason d' être of ethnic group identity.⁴ And ethnic conflict per se as Donald Horowitz argues is a recurrent phenomenon. Shifting contexts make ethnicity more or less prominent. In this sense the international environment plays a part in its emergence and remission.⁵

Often overshadowed by international warfare and masked by wartime alliances, ethnic allegiances are usually revived by the wartime experience or emerge again soon afterward. Thus, ethnicity finds its way into a myriad of issues: development plans, educational controversies, trade union affairs, land policy, business policy, tax policy. Characteristically, issues that elsewhere would be relegated to the category of routine administration assume a central place on the political agenda of ethnically divided societies.⁶

For instance, Medvedev (1993) views the initiation and escalation of ethnic conflicts related to the process of national self-determination in regards to already post-Soviet republics. The tensions observed on the post-Soviet territory arose in the wake of *perestroika* and directed to the establishment of the priority of the collective rights of an ethnic group over the rights of the individual.⁷ Moreover, in recent years, the development of political theory has thus provided with rich and varied discussions concerning the actual and potential consequences for modern nation-states of ethnic and ethnonational claims. Questions of

⁴ Adel Safty, *Leadership and Conflict Resolution: The International Leadership Series Book Three* (Universal-Publishers, 2003), p.232-240.

⁵ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California Press, Berkeley,1985), pp. 3-54.

⁶ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* , pp. 3-54.

⁷ Adel Safty, *Leadership and Conflict Resolution: The International Leadership Series Book Three*, p.254.

ethnicity, nationalism, and identity politics have been usefully explored in relation to fundamental normative concepts such as equality, liberty, democracy, and justice.⁸

The most common literature delving into the matters of ethnicity is usually presented as a debate between primordialist and constructivist thinking. Thus, the comparison between two theoretical frameworks: constructivism and primordialism, illustrates more profound understanding about ethnic conflicts and their origin. “Primordialism” is defined by three minimal propositions: (1) Individuals have a single ethnic identity (2) This ethnic identity is by its nature fixed (3) This ethnic identity is exogenous to human processes. The constructivist refutation consists of three counter-propositions: (1) Individuals have multiple not single ethnic identities. (2) These identities can change (although often they do not). (3) Such change, when it occurs, is the product of some human process.⁹

Stefan Wolff suggests that empirically, it is relatively easy to determine which conflict is an ethnic one: one knows them when one sees them. Few would dispute that Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Cyprus, the Israeli–Palestinian dispute, the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kashmir, and Sri Lanka are all, in one way or another, ethnic conflicts. This is so because their manifestations are violent and their causes and consequences obviously ethnic.¹⁰

Yet, although all of these conflicts have been violent, S. Wolff argues that violence in each of them was of different degrees of intensity. In contrast to such violent ethnic conflicts, relationships between Estonians and Russians in Estonia and the complex dynamics of interaction between the different linguistic groups in Canada, Belgium, and France are also predominantly based on distinct ethnic identities and (incompatible) interest structures, yet

⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups*, in *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*, eds. Stephen May, Tariq Modood, and Judith Squires (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-50.

⁹ Kanchan Chandra, *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2012), Chapter 1.

¹⁰ Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: Global Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p.2.

their manifestations are less violent, and it is far less common to describe these situations as ethnic conflicts. Rather, terms such as ‘tension’, ‘dispute’, and ‘unease’ are used.¹¹

Finally, there are also situations in which various ethnic groups have different, and more or less frequently conflicting, interest structures, but hardly ever is the term ‘tensions’, let alone ‘conflict’, used to describe them, such as in relation to Switzerland where conflicts of interest are handled within fairly stable and legitimate political institutions. Hence, not every ethnic conflict is characterized by violence, but inter-ethnic violence is always a sign of underlying conflict.¹²

Particularly the ethnic conflicts observed on area of the former Soviet Union provide different definitions regarding the typology of ethnic conflicts: 1) general, structural, and systematic causes; 2) cases related to Soviet and pre-Soviet legacies; and 3) causes resulting from the process of rapid socio-political change itself.¹³ Obviously, ethnopolitical conflict has, since the early 1990s, been a growing source of concern in the international arena. Ethnic mobilization among minority populations in multiethnic states has often led to demands for self-rule or to secession.¹⁴

The article of Thomas de Waal gives a more specific understanding, concentrating on the existing conflicts in South Caucasus, the actors involved in the region; and also describes the possible scenarios of developments. The fractious Caucasus could also give birth to other conflicts that would destabilize the wider region. Both Armenia and Georgia have defused tensions in the Armenian-populated province of Javakhk in Georgia.¹⁵

Furthermore, approximately six percent of the population of Georgia is ethnic Armenian, most of whom live in the Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts of the Samtskhe-

¹¹ Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: Global Perspective*, p.2.

¹² Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: Global Perspective*, p. 3.

¹³ Adel Safty, *Leadership and Conflict Resolution: The International Leadership Series Book Three* (Universal-Publishers, 2003), p.232-240.

¹⁴ Svante Cornell E., *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict: Experiences from the Caucasus* (2002), p. 3-9.

¹⁵ ThomasDe Waal, *Reinventing the Caucasus* (World Policy Journal, Vol. 19, No.1, Spring, 2002), pp.51-59.

Javakheti region, along the Turkish and Armenian borders. Despite some conflictual elements existing between Armenia and Georgia in this regard, there is little of an irredentist threat, and official Armenian policy does not seek to weaken Georgia through its Armenian minority. And approximately seven percent of the Georgian population is ethnic Azeri, most of whom live in the Kvemo Kartli region along the Azerbaijan border; a small number of ethnic Georgians live near the border, in Azerbaijan. There is no irredentist threat from either. Most Armenians and Azeris are compactly settled and segregated from one another, but there is some degree of trade between the communities.¹⁶

The paper *Javakhk: Stability through Autonomy* by R. Giragosian discusses particularly the situation in Javakhk when Georgia gained independence when Gamsakhurdia came to power and the further developments during the Shevardnadze's governance. From the point of view of studying ethnic conflicts in regards to Javakhk, the study underlines the conditions of Javakhk as a factor of instability: virtually nonexistence of local industry, i.e. economic hardships, infrastructure problems, influx of Meskhetian Turks.¹⁷ Accordingly, the paper displays the policy shifts over Javakhk under the Gamsakhurdia's and Shevardnadze's administrations.¹⁸

Whereas describing the existing situation after August war 2008 between Georgia and Russia, Tonoyan mentions Russia's role in the region remains as a source of external tension which has experienced a steady decline in the region on practically all fronts—with the exception of Armenia. Internal factors that have contributed to the deterioration of the ethno-political situation in Georgia are *vis-à-vis* its Armenian minority. The research explicitly displays the problems of the Armenian minority living in Javakhk, the growing alienation Javakhk Armenians. As a problem A. Tonoyan mentions among the lack of political will of

¹⁶ Eka Metreveli and Jonathan Kulick . *Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia* (Country case study: Georgia. IFP Democratisation and Transitional Justice Cluster April, 2009), p.9

¹⁷ Meskhetian Turks are the ethnic Turks formerly inhabiting the Meskheta region of Georgia, along the border with Turkey.

¹⁸ Richard Giragosian, *Javakhk: Stability through Autonomy* (March, 2001), pp.1-10.

the Georgian government and resources to address the very real economic issues prevalent in the Armenian-populated areas of Georgia.¹⁹

Another so called “ethnic element” presents Ajaria but unlike the Abkhazians and Ossetians who constitute ethnic groups that are linguistically unrelated to Georgians, Ajarans speak Georgian and consider themselves to be Georgian. However the case of Ajaria is rather atypical. On the surface, the comparison may look plausible: Ajaria was once an autonomous republic within Georgia, and, until May 2004, the Georgian central government exercised little control over it. Nor was there ever a separate Ajarian national project, which makes Ajaria very different from South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Thus, even when Ajarian authorities defied Tbilisi, they never did so as ideological separatists. On the contrary, Ajaria’s former leader, Aslan Abashidze, loved to portray himself as a champion of Georgian unity. Thus, in Ajaria the conflict was institutional and political, not ethnic. As in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the root of the problem did start from the institutional setup inherent in the Soviet system of autonomous units.²⁰

Within the same timeframe tensions were also observed in Kvemo Kartli region. The demand of the “autonomy of Borchalo” was first heard then, but this demand was not followed by any serious consequences. Owing to the ethnic conflicts breaking out in Georgian autonomies in South Osetia and Abkhazia in the beginning of 1990s Georgian government avoided the emergence of tensions in Kvemo Kartli and the conflict was settled. Therefore, the analogous demand was never stated in open way in Kvemo Kartli.²¹

In conclusion, in regards to ethnic conflicts, they are not generally concentrated among poor states, nor are they unusually common among countries experiencing economic globalization. However, ethnic conflicts do not disappear when societies “modernize.” They

¹⁹ Artyom Tonoyan , *Rising Armenian-Georgian Tensions and the Possibility of a New Ethnic Conflict in the South Caucasus* (Demokratizatsiya, 18(4), 2010), pp. 287-308 (Retrieved from EBSCOhost database).

²⁰ Bruno Coppieters; Robert Legvold, *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005).Chapter 1 Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity by *Ghia Nodia*, pp.53, 54.

²¹Mamuka Komakhia, *Azerbaijani Population in Georgia* (UNHCR, UNAG, 2003), pp.7,8.

are likely to be much less lethal in societies that are developed, economically open, and receptive to globalization. Ethnic battles in industrial and industrializing societies tend either to be argued civilly or at least limited to the political violence of marginal groups, such as the provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army) in the United Kingdom, Quebec in Canada.²²

Methodology

Primary data is applied for the elaboration of the Master's Essay. Several in-depth interviews are carried out among the politicians and representatives of research institutions who are originally from Javakhk, aware about the situation there and have made a research regarding to Javakhk and other regions of Georgia like Ajaria and Kvemo Kartli. Also official documents are reviewed for the essay.

Nevertheless, the main method used for this essay is secondary analysis based on the study of various sources: mainly books, articles, policy papers for the analysis of ethnicity, the nature of ethnic conflicts, for the study of specific cases of minorities on the territory of Georgia, specifically in Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria.

The study can be considered both explanatory and descriptive which aims to find out appropriate theoretical frameworks for the study of ethnic conflicts, illustrate that ethnic conflicts per se are not solely based on the factor of ethnicity but incorporates many other factors as well. Thus, the study will elucidate exiting ethnic issues exiting in Georgia and give an analytical review.

The limitation for the research may be considered inability to carry out fieldwork in the regions of Javakhk, Ajaria and Kvemo Kartli. The fieldwork in those regions might have provided with current patterns of development and might have given a detailed picture on the situation in regards to ethnic minorities in the above mentioned regions.

²² Sadowski, Yahya, *Ethnic Conflict* (Foreign Policy, No. 111, Summer, 1998), pp. 12-23 (Accessed: 15/01/2012 09:53).

Part 1.

The Nature of Ethnic Conflicts

A major component of this study consists of arriving at and agreeing upon a set of definitions for the study of the cases of Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria. In this regard the concepts like, *ethnicity*, *ethnic groups*, *conflict*²³ and lastly *ethnic conflict* should be defined. Nevertheless for a comprehensive understanding of the conflicts which have an ethnic nature, first the concept of ethnicity should be discussed. Henry Hale provides the following explanation: Aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive.²⁴ And in this context M. Hetcher²⁵ defines *ethnic groups* as the groups arising out of the desire for *culturally* distinctive collective goods (such as state institutions), which are valued due to the *shared practices and ways of life (religion, language, modes of production)* that culture represents. And for defining what ethnic conflict is, first of all, the concept of *conflict* should be clarified. Hence, the concept of conflict in the works of Rubin, Pruitt and Kim²⁶ is defined as *perceived divergence of interest*, or a belief that the parties' current aspiration cannot be achieved simultaneously.

Ethnic conflict in this respect is defined in the Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military²⁷ as *war, civil war, or other conflict between or among two or more racial, language, or religious groups*. Furthermore, ethnic conflicts are extremely diverse, ranging from legitimate political, social, cultural, and economic grievances of disadvantaged ethnic groups to predatory agendas of states and small cartels of elites, to so-called national security interests. Therefore, it is necessary carefully to analyze the different actors and factors that are at work in each conflict and the way in which they combine to lead to violent escalation

²³ See Appendix 1: Conflict Stages.

²⁴ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World* (Cambridge, 2008), p.20.

²⁵ Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 7–14.

²⁶ Dean Pruitt, Jeffrey Rubin, Sung Hee Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (McGraw-Hill (New York), 1994), p.7.

²⁷ The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military (Berkley, 2001).

or constructive conflict management and settlement.²⁸ The manifestations of ethnicity and the demands raised by ethnic groups also vary by the degree of their intensity from violent manifestations like Israeli–Palestinian dispute, the genocide in Rwanda, to disputes, tensions like different linguistic groups in Canada, Javakhki Armenians in Georgian.

From theoretical perspective, Henry Hale in his book “Foundations of Ethnic Politics”²⁹ states that one large body of theory is built on the assumption that ethnicity inherently reflects motivations that tend to put groups in conflict. Two important caveats are crucial for understanding this point. First, the key words are “tend to”: Few would argue all groups are always in active states of conflict with all other groups. Thus, the core tenet of this set of theories is that ethnicity arises out of motivations that naturally put groups potentially at odds. People may not necessarily be aware of their ethnicity (as with isolated hunter-gatherer tribes) and even when they are aware of it, they may face constraints that suppress or override these conflictual tendencies. Nevertheless, to introduce an ethnic difference between two otherwise identical and entirely peaceful groups is to introduce a tension between them that raises the likelihood of conflict. Second, “conflict” is defined broadly: It can be both violent (as in ethnic riots) and nonviolent (as in competition among ethnic parties in a democracy). While grouping theories under broad labels risks oversimplifying some highly sophisticated works, the pages that follow will refer to such theories as ethnicity-as-conflictual theories because this will help make the following discussion more readable despite the somewhat infelicitous terminology. And as the various theories explaining ethnic conflicts per se come in many forms, theories- so called ethnicity-as-conflictual theories are divided into three main categories: hard, soft and ultrasoft.³⁰

²⁸ Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: Global Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 5,6.

²⁹ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 16.

³⁰ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics*, p.16.

Two tenets distinguish the “hard” perspective: that ethnic identity is rooted in fundamental human desires for dignity, self-esteem, and/or belonging, and, crucially, that these values are intrinsically *relative*, that they are realized through distinguishing one’s own group from that of another. The key reason why people identify so strongly with ethnic groups – even to the point of being willing to kill or die for their groups – is that they are inherently linked with people’s deepest feelings, the things that stir the blood, core needs for dignity, self-esteem, and/or belonging.³¹

However the hard approach has several shortcomings, at least insofar as it is a candidate for a fundamental theory of ethnicity. Empirically, to suppose that the motives behind ethnic groups are inherently conflictual would seem to predict far more ethnic conflict than in fact occurs. But perhaps the biggest problem for the hard theories, though, is that their microlevel foundation has been rendered dubious by more recent research. A key psychological underpinning of these theories is Tajfel’s³² finding that people, when given a chance to choose between maximizing group difference and maximizing their own group’s welfare, prefer to maximize group difference as a means of enhancing their own self-esteem. But since the 1970s and 1980s, when most of the seminal research cited by the hard theorists was published, new findings have undermined the basis for the claim that ethnic groups inherently reflect a discriminatory or conflictual urge to gain self-esteem. For one thing, this form of discriminatory behavior was found to have depended on as many as two conditions that Tajfel did not recognize were present in his study’s laboratory environment.

The so called soft theories, describing the ethnic conflicts suggest a more moderate view. The latter shares the notion that ethnicity is based on inherently conflictual tendencies but sees these tendencies as being rooted in value differences that are defined in absolute more than relative terms. In other words, ethnic differences reflect values that are simply

³¹ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics*, p.16.

³² Henri Tajfel, “Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, v.33, 1982, pp. 1–39.

divergent, not the creations of a desire for favorable comparisons with other groups. By these lights, ethnicity and nationality are constituted by cultural attributes that frequently involve particular beliefs and desires that are likely to differ from those of other groups.

For example, speakers of Language A might not feel any better about themselves by knowing that speakers of Language B are downtrodden, but they may prefer to live in a country where Language A is the sole government language to one where Language B is the sole government language. Similarly, inhabitants of a particular territory are likely to share socioeconomic ways of life that give them shared interests differing from those of groups residing elsewhere. It may be, then, that ethnic groups simply reflect distinctive cultural values, a supposition that would lead one to expect intergroup conflict (violent or otherwise) to be a normal occurrence.³³

M. Hechter³⁴ views ethnic groups arising out of the desire for culturally distinctive collective goods (such as state institutions), which are valued due to the shared practices and ways of life (religion, language, modes of production) that culture represents. Hechter cites findings that people identify most strongly with those aspects of identity that have the greatest implications for their social status and material well-being. People are most concerned about reordering group status rankings when they cannot escape their own groups. For this reason, ethnic solidarity tends to be very strong where there is a cultural division of labor, where cultural markers largely determine one's place in the economy. Self-esteem considerations, then, do not generate distinct group values but instead help determine which among many group memberships become most salient to an individual.³⁵

The soft approach leaves several important questions unanswered, however. For one thing, if ethnic groups arise from common values and overcome the collective action problem

³³ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World*, p.20.

³⁴ Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³⁵ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 21.

through a system of monitoring and sanctions, how can we explain group behavior when no system of monitoring or sanctions is in place or when no culturally specific collective goods are in fact at stake?³⁶

A third body of work positing that ethnic identity involves conflictual tendencies might be labeled an “ultrasoft” approach. It is ultrasoft in the sense that identity in general, and the values attached to ethnicity in particular, are seen as almost purely a matter of consciousness. People belong to an ethnic group when they believe they belong to an ethnic group. Ethnic groups are associated with conflictual drives when people link their ethnic identity to desires that put them at odds with other ethnic groups. This is not purely tautological since most such accounts hold that consciousness is produced through complex but specific historical experiences that shape people’s beliefs about what their place in the world is and should be. Moreover, most of these theories hold that these specific historical experiences have constructed people’s senses of ethnic identity in such a way that ethnic groups have a tendency to be in conflict, at least in “modern” times.³⁷

However the analysis of this set of theories regarding the concept of ethnicity-as-conflictual does not provide with an answer how ethnicity at particular point emerges and becomes prioritized by the ethnic groups. In view of that, it is important to explore the factors which bring the parties at odds with each other regardless cultural differences. As an example, the ethnic conflicts which emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union cannot be viewed on solely cultural basis. Other exogenous and endogenous aspects need to be taken into account like economic factors, instability, interests of different actors, administrative capabilities, etc.

Many of the most prominent works in this tradition bring forward factors that may have an impact on a stronger illustration of ethnicity in particular groups. Furthermore, a

³⁶ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World*, p.21.

³⁷ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics*, p.22.

number of theories in this respect stress the crucial roles of *industrialization* and the state in generating *nationalism*. Marx and Engels were among the earliest such theorists, arguing that the idea of national loyalty was essentially generated by ruling capitalists so as to distract the working class from its “true” identity as the proletariat, a distraction temporarily made possible by the realities of the capitalist stage of development.³⁸ However, many non-Marxist works stressing industrialization or “modernization” also treat ethnic politics and nationalism as a temporary phase in history: Industrialization brings previously isolated communities into contact with each other and generates modern states that promote domestic unity by fostering loyalty to a national culture. This produces conflict because state-sponsored nationalism is defined against outside groups and because local groups whose cultures are left out of the nationalization project tend to define their own ethnic consciousness in opposition to the dominant culture.³⁹

Donald Horowitz⁴⁰ also views ethnic conflict as a phenomenon often been studied in the context of *modernization*. He suggests three ways how modernization can be regarded in the context of ethnic conflicts. The first is to view ethnic conflict as a mere relic of an outmoded traditionalism, doomed to be overtaken by the incursions of modernity. The second is to regard ethnic conflict as a traditional but unusually stubborn impediment to modernization. The third is to interpret ethnic conflicts as an integral part – even a product – of the process of modernization itself. Furthermore, Horowitz states that although ethnic conflicts may find their roots in ethnic memory of the group, however ethnic conflicts is not just the persistence or recrudescence of earlier antagonisms. There are many ethnic groups which are rather new creations like in the new states of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. And as the groups are not themselves traditional, they could not have had

³⁸ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World*, p.22.

³⁹ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World*, p.24.

⁴⁰ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 96-100.

traditional rivalries among themselves. The case of Rwanda is typical. When Europeans first stumbled across it, most of the country was already united under a central monarchy whose inhabitants spoke the same language, shared the same cuisine and culture, and practiced the same religion. Thus D.Horowitz (2008) states:

“History can be a weapon, and tradition can fuel ethnic conflict, but a current conflict cannot generally be explained by simply calling it a revived form of an earlier conflict.”⁴¹

Study of Primordialist and Constructivist Theories

History as a matter of ethnicity is also regarded by primordialist and constructivist theories which suggest contrasting approaches to the nature of ethnicity. Thus, primordialists, as suggested by the term itself, are widely held to believe that ethnic identities are age-old and enduring. According to it, each of us belongs to one and only one ethnic group and that group membership remains fixed over a lifetime, and it is passed down intact across generations. Wars begin and end, states grow and die, economies boom and crash, but through it all, ethnic groups stay the same. This way of thinking about ethnic identity drives theorizing in the social sciences on the relationship between ethnicity and political and economic outcomes and processes. Like many influential ideas, its power lies in its invisibility. It is rarely stated explicitly and almost never defended. But it is pervasive in the common sense assumptions that inform statements about other things. When political scientists and economists build and test theories of the relationship between ethnicity and democratic stability, party systems, voting behaviour, economic growth, civil war, riots, state formation, state collapse, welfare spending, public goods provision and just about everything else, we assume, almost without exception, that the ethnic identities that describe individuals and populations are singular, timeless and fixed for all time.⁴²

⁴¹ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 14.

⁴² Kanchan Chandra, *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2012), Chapter 1.

Constructivism, on the other hand, has essentially become a blanket term capturing all other theories, all accounts that do not actually believe that ethnic identities are literally age-old or permanent. According to constructivist theories, ethnic identities are not singular, nor are they fixed. The constructivist approach sees nations and nationalism as the creations of various elites, often for symbolic as well as instrumental reasons. Thus, for example, the Native American population in the United States grew by 50 percent in 1970, by more than 80 percent in 1980, and over 30 percent in 1990. The number of Muslims in Bosnia increased up to 75% between 1961 and 1971. During the same period, the number of “Yugoslavs” in Bosnia decreased by 84% (Bringa 1995, 28). 31% of the population of Britain thought of themselves as English in 1992. Less than ten years later, the number had increased to 41%. The same shift in identity was taking place among Welsh and Scots who might have called themselves “British” earlier.⁴³

What is more, constructivism tells us, these changes *can be a product of the very political and economic phenomena that they are used to explain*. The processes associated with a stable democracy – elections, parties, cycles of political competition – can create or change the ethnic divisions that are presumed to threaten stable democracy. The processes associated with economic growth – industrialization, urbanization, print capitalism, differential modernization, changes in employment opportunities – can create or change the ethnic divisions presumed to threaten economic growth. The processes associated with the modern state -- administrative centralization, the collection of statistics, taxation, language standardization, the creation of centralized educational systems and military and security apparatuses -- can create or change the ethnic divisions presumed to cause their collapse. Welfare spending and public goods provision can create or change the ethnic identities

⁴³ Kanchan Chandra, *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2012), Chapter 1.

presumed to affect patterns of welfare spending and public goods provision. And violence in its many forms can create or change the ethnic differences presumed to cause violence.⁴⁴

However once each position is respecified in cognitive terms, it becomes apparent that primordialist and circumstantialist accounts need not be mutually exclusive. The former can help explain the seemingly universal tendency to naturalize and essentialize real or imputed human differences, while the latter can help explain how ethnicity becomes relevant or salient in particular contexts. Rather than contradicting one another, they can be seen as directed largely to different questions: on the one hand, how groups are conceived and folk sociologies constructed and sustained; on the other hand, how ethnicity works in interactional practice.⁴⁵

In general, the study of ethnic conflicts shows that ethnic conflicts have consistently formed the vast majority of wars ever since the epoch of decolonization began to sweep the developing countries after 1945. Although the number of ethnic conflicts has continued to grow since the Cold War ended, it has done so at a slow and steady rate, remaining consistent with the overall trend of the last 50 years. In 1990 and 1991, however, several new and highly visible ethnic conflicts erupted as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.⁴⁶

Scholars have also identified a host of risks that accompany increased social mobilization in situations when economic and political change increase popular grievances.⁴⁷ Referring to erupted conflicts in the 1990's after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the major changes that occurred probably illustrates the argument that economic and political factors play a crucial role in determining the rise of conflicts per se. And hereby those factors represent somehow a kind of a base for ethnic identity to emerge.

⁴⁴Kanchan Chandra, *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2012, Chapter 1.

⁴⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004, p.48

⁴⁶ Yahya Sadowski, *Ethnic Conflict* (Foreign Policy, No. 111 Summer, 1998), p. 12.

⁴⁷ Olga Oliker, Thomas Szayna, *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus : implications for the U.S. Army* (2003), p.10

Discussing Javakheti (full name Smaskhe-Javakheti)⁴⁸ region populated with ethnic Armenians, one may apply the primordialist perspective, stating the conflict was there and can be viewed as a fixed one. The collapse of the Soviet Union merely intensified the tensions existing in the region. But the problem existed and throughout history there were observed tensions among Armenian and Georgian populations.

However, ethnicity cannot be regarded as a fix entity. On the contrary state policies may have a direct impact on the ethnic minorities. Furthermore, studying particular case of Javakheti Armenians, political and economic factors stand up after Georgia's gaining independence in 1991. From this perspective, already "fixed" situation in the region which became subtle and the preset tensions may be turned into serious conflicts can be regarded from the constructivist account. For Javakheti case ethnic tensions that have been cushioned by the Georgian government while the presidency of Z. Gamsakhurdia and E. Shevarnadze and up to the presidency of M. Saakashvili is because of the third party involved in the presented ethnic conflict/tension which is the Armenian government itself and the policies towards its ethnic minorities and Armenian-Georgian relations. The latter turned out to play a major role in determining the implemented policies in regards to Javakheti Armenians. Nonetheless, the studied theories make implications too various factors but most of them omit the factor of the third party and its interests. However it should be admitted that while the study of three cases in the southern part of Georgia history could have been regarded as tool intensifying separatist movements in the regions particularly for Ajaria and Javakheti. But the detailed investigation of Javakheti region and the situation of other ethnic minorities after Georgia's independence are elaborated in the consequent chapters of the Master's Essay.

⁴⁸ Full name Smaskhe-Javakheti - region formed in the 1990s in southern part of Georgia from the historical provinces of Meskheta and Javakheti. Akhaltsikhe is its capital.

Part 2

Georgia after Independence: Emergence of Conflictual Elements in Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Georgian society faced an intricate web of fracture based on ethnicity, religion, and sub-ethnic regional loyalties, fractures which were often reinforced by territoriality and administrative structures. At the time of Georgian independence, there were two ethnic-based autonomous territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and one religious-based autonomous territory (Ajaria) that had enjoyed certain administrative privileges in the Soviet era. Another distinguishing factor is that during the first Georgian attempt to create an independent state from 1918 to 1921 both Abkhazia and South Ossetia had already been the scenes of violent conflict. And according to Ghia Nodia the clash of Georgian, Abkhazian, and Ossetian national projects inevitably had to lead to violent conflicts.⁴⁹

The following chapter will delve into the particular cases of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli (Borchalo)⁵⁰ after Georgia's independence and see what the implications for ethnic conflict to erupt are and understand the incentives for cooperation among the ethnic minorities and the Georgian government rather than choosing the option of conflict. The cases of Javakhk and Kvemo Kartli serve as examples when despite of the tensions that followed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia's becoming an independent state, the observed ethnic tensions never turned into violent conflict up to the war. This chapter will also present the tensions in Ajaria which are interesting from the perspective that religion is a

⁴⁹Bruno Coppieters,; Robert Legvold, *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005). Chapter 1 Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity by *Ghia Nodia*, pp. 44-51.

⁵⁰ Kvemo Kartli comprises several districts in which ethnic minorities make up a significant part of the population, mostly Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Greeks. Azerbaijanis often refer to Kvemo Kartli region as Borchalo. Borchalo is a historical part of Kvemo Kartli.

component part of ethnicity and study the stance of the Georgian government performed towards its religious Muslim minority concentrated in Ajaria.⁵¹

The two largest national minority communities in Georgia are Azerbaijanis (6.5 percent) and Armenians (5.7 percent). The bulk of Georgia's Armenians and Azerbaijanis live concentrated along the borders with their kin states (Armenians in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli). But in several districts of these two regions, the minorities actually account for the majority of the population.⁵²

Georgia's majority ethnic-Armenian region of Javakheti was sometimes regarded as a potential flashpoint for conflict. Starting with the Gamsakhurdia era not only in Javakheti could be observed a dramatic rise of conflictual elements because of growing nationalistic sentiments in Georgia but in many other regions as well. Furthermore, Georgia which had never been a unitary or mono-ethnic state under Gamsakhurdia regime was declared as "Georgia for Georgians."⁵³ Furthermore, this period in the history of post-Soviet Georgia was not only characterized by manifestation of extremes of nationalistic tendencies in the actions and statements of the Georgian leaders and political groups but also coincided with profound political and economic crisis, the civil war and the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁵⁴ Referring to the developments of that period, Shirak Torosyan⁵⁵ noted during the interview: *"Instable situation was observed in Georgia after collapse of the Soviet Union. Soon nationalists came to power which created the atmosphere of hatred. The conflict did not wait and started immediately in Abkhazia."*

⁵¹ See Appendix 2: Map of Georgia's Regions.

⁵² Magdalena Frichova, *Participation of Persons Belonging to National Minorities - Cases of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Gali* (International Journal on Minority & Group Rights, Vol. 16 Issue 4, 2009), pp. 643-651.

⁵³ Svante Cornell and Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (2008), p. 16.

⁵⁴ Sergey Minasyan, *From Political Rallies to Conventions* (Yerevan, 2007), p. 14.

⁵⁵ Interview with Shirak Torosyan. MP, Head of "Javakhk Patriotic Union" (Yerevan, 07 June, 2012). See Appendixes 3,4 with the names of the interviewees and the interview questionnaire.

Javakhk

Armenians account for approximately six percent of the population of Georgia, with about 150,000 living in Samtskhe-Javakheti. According to the 1989 census, 437,211 Armenians lived in Georgia (8.1% of the total population). Roughly 150 000 lived in Tbilisi and also 75 000 in Abkhazia. The largest group, however (about 200 000), lived in Javakheti (over 90% of the local population) and Meskheti (about 1/3 of the local population).⁵⁶

Javakhk/Javakheti consists of two districts (Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki) of the six in the Georgian administrative region of Samtskhe-Javakheti. The population of Javakhk is overwhelmingly ethnic Armenian. The district of Akhaltsikhe contains the region's administrative capital, is approximately one-half Armenian.⁵⁷ Armenians are 55% of the the total population of Samtskhe-Javakheti (207,600 according to the 2002 census). In its six districts, Armenians are 98% of Ninotsminda, 94.3% of Akhalkalaki, 37% of Akhaltsikhe, 17.5% of Aspindza, 9.64% of Borjomi and 3.4% of Adigeni. Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki are generally considered to form the historical Armenian territory of Javakhk. Located on a high rocky plateau, with (until recently) extremely poor road links, it has been isolated from the rest of Georgia, also because it was a zone of restricted access during the period of Soviet rule, due to its shared border with Turkey.⁵⁸

Before the study of the conditions referring to ethnic minorities in Javakhk after Georgia's independence, it should be noted that from 1918 to 1920 Javakhk was considered a disputable territory which afterwards under the decision of partisan bodies was given to Georgia. Thus, after the dissolution and in the 1980's when various internal movements started within the region and in general among 15 Soviet Republics, the internal tensions

⁵⁶AndroBarnovi, *Detailed Review on Samtskhe-Javakheti* (Institute for Strategy and Development, Januray 22, 2009), p.9.

⁵⁷Eka Metreveli; Jonathan Kulick, *Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia* (April, 2009), p.9.

⁵⁸ Fact Sheet, *Resolving the Grievances of the Armenians of Samtskhe- Javakheti* (Armenian Cause Foundation, February 2011), p.1 <http://www.armeniancause.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/20110216-Javakhk-short-brief-FINAL.pdf>.

became more as it was conceived time when the future status of the region should have decided. Vahe Sargsyan (the researcher of the “Mitq” Analytical Centre) in his book distinguishes the problems simultaneously dealing with three spheres that have been and still are: socio-economic, politico-military, and cultural-religious.⁵⁹

Georgia’s campaign for independence from the Soviet Union was led by the dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a firebrand Georgian nationalist, whose slogan was “Georgia for the Georgians.” In the 1990s, the combination of a weak and troubled Georgian state and the simultaneous establishment of other independent states of minorities’ titular ethnicities led to mass emigration, so that ethnic Georgians accounted for an increasing share of the population. The reemergence of the Georgian Orthodox Church, after nearly a century of suppression, also fed Georgian nationalism. Thus, after Georgia acquired independence, Samskhe-Javakheti was left on its own because weak Georgian state failed to exercise effective control of the region. The rise of nationalist rhetoric by Gamsakhurdia and other nationalist leaders created fertile grounds for centrifugal forces in Samske-Javakheti, just as in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁶⁰

Thus, Javakhet developed governance systems on the basis of informal networks on which ethnic identities were based. The consolidation of the central government’s control was achieved through its mastery of patron-client relations. And in February 1991, in response to perceived ethnic chauvinism on the part of the Gamsakhurdia government, a Provisional Council of Representatives was established in Akhalkalaki *rayon*. A twenty-four member Council was formed from the Provisional Council and this body went on to elect a seven-member Presidium (one member of which was an ethnic Georgian). The popular movement also successfully prevented Gamsakhurdia from imposing his choice of Prefect on

⁵⁹ Vahe Sargsyan, *Samske-Javakhet-Trekhet in the Context of Armenian-Georgian Relations* (National Academy of Science, Yerevan, 2006), p. 51.

⁶⁰ Andro Barnovi, *Detailed Review on Samtskhe-Javakheti* (Institute for Strategy and Development, January 22, 2009), p.20.

the *rayon* of Akhalkalaki; after three successive nominees of Gamsakhurdia were forcefully prevented from entering the local government offices, the Georgian government was forced to accept one of the leaders of Javakhk, Samvel Petrosyan, as Prefect (*gamgebeli*) of the *rayon*. Following Petrosyan's appointment in November 1991, the Council of Representatives was voluntarily disbanded. It is interesting to note that even in 1991, when tension between Javakhk and the Georgian government was at its height, a motion demanding independence for Javakhk was rejected by the Provisional Council. Local Armenians maintain that the establishment of the council was merely a response to events in other part of Georgia and was not a manifestation of separatism.⁶¹

However, Shevardnaze's return to Georgia in 1992 presented a relatively mild rhetoric; the implemented policy actually continued Gamsakhurdia's nationalistic ideology towards ethnic minorities. Shevardnadze administration tried to avoid violent clashes and preferred to concede positions rather than escalate the situation. Hence, Javakhk's power base gradually began to diminish. Petrosyan retained his post for about a year, but resigned both as *gamgebeli* and as leader of the Javakhk movement as internal divisions began to weaken the movement. Despite Javakhk's opposition, in 1994 the Georgian government created a de facto Georgian province out of Samtskhe-Javakheti, and the President appointed his own "authorised representative" or governor to the province. The establishment of Samtskhe-Javakheti as a province with its own governor represented a serious setback for Javakhk. The merger of the mainly Georgian Samtskhe with Javakhk was a clear signal that Tbilisi had no intention of granting any form of autonomy whatsoever to the Armenian population of Javakhk.⁶² Studying the particular case of Javakhk Vahe Sargsyan (the

⁶¹ Jonathan Wheatley, *Obstacles Impeding the regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia* (ECMI Working Paper # 22, September 2004). pp.13-14.

⁶² Jonathan Wheatley, *Obstacles Impeding the regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia*. ECMI Working Paper # 22, September 2004), p.14.

researcher of the “Mitq” analytical centre) stated that the Armenians always considered the Georgians very close to them.

“The Armenian community was not against Georgia’s independence, it supported the newly formed regime of the president Gamsakhurdia, then the Armenians supported Shevardnadze. Of course they were dissatisfied. The example can be when in 1994 Javakhhk was joined to Samtskhe region and Tsalka which was always a part of the Javakhhk region, was not included. Armenians have a great contribution in Tbilisi. Cultural heritage of Armenians is immense. But there were no global claims both by the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides to become a separate entity.”⁶³

On the surface Javakheti has maintained stability since Shevardnadze’s government was able to defeat the most tenacious of the Georgian paramilitary groups (such as the *Mkhedrioni*⁶⁴) in 1994-95. However there have been certain stirrings of discontent, as a result of a combination of factors, such as the poor economic situation in the region and Tbilisi’s desire to remove the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. Calls for greater autonomy were voiced periodically. In 1997, for example, members of Javakhhk collected signatures demanding the abolition of the administrative region (i.e. province) of Samtskhe-Javakheti and the establishment of a Javakheti province. Organizers of the petition claim that they were obstructed from collecting signatures by the police.⁶⁵

New intensification of tensions started in April, when Javakhhk association demanded that ethnic Armenian battalion be created in Georgian Army, for conscripts from Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki. The third demand was to stop plans regarding Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project which was signed by Eduard Shevardnadze and Suleyman

⁶³ Interview with Vahe Sargsyan. “Mitq” Analytical Center (Yerevan, 26 May, 2012).

⁶⁴The *Mkhedrioni* was a paramilitary group and political organisation in the Republic of Georgia, outlawed since 1995 but subsequently reconstituted as the Union of Patriots political party. Founded in 1989 by Jaba Ioseliani, the *Mkhedrioni* presented itself as the heir to historic Georgian guerrilla groups who fought Persia and Ottoman occupiers.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Wheatley, *Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Javakheti Region of Georgia*. p. 15.

Demirel. Clearly, the railway would alter geopolitics of the region, with increasing economic and political interaction with Turkey. Javakhk demands can be divided on two parts by type: identity-related (autonomy, special Armenian unit within Georgian Army), and political (opposition to Turkish railway).⁶⁶

Referring to the Armenian official position on Javakhk, the stance of the Armenian government in regards to Javakhk and its problems remained and is very cautious. The three interviewees⁶⁷ expressed the same point in regards to the Armenian government's stance towards the Armenian ethnic minority in Javakhk, stating that the Armenian government considered and still considers the situation in Javakhk as internal matter of Georgia. However the international conventions of the UN (e.g. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities 1992), also OSCE (e.g. The Final Act of the CSCE, Helsinki, 1975) allow the third party in this case Armenia to assist the Armenians in Javakhk. Thus, Shirak Torosyan⁶⁸ mentioned although the Armenian stance to view the problems of Javakhki Armenians through the prism that Georgia is the main communicative link within the blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey, the Armenian government must protect the interests of their minorities outside.

Hence, the problems that could provoke the possibility of conflicts in the mentioned above regions were not created out of nowhere and were present in the period of the Soviet Union. The emerged instability was against the policy that the Georgian government took against the Armenians, the laws which contradicted the interests of the Javakhki Armenians. Furthermore, the conditions which were created after the independence where not much different from the existing patterns under the Soviet rule, however the crucial change was the *uncertainty of the situation* and the *exacerbation of the problems*. As examples can serve the

⁶⁶AndroBarnovi, *Detailed Review on Samtskhe-Javakheti* (Institute for Strategy and Development, January 22, 2009), p.21.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Sergey Minasyan (Caucasus Institute, Yerevan, 2012), Shirak Torosyan (MP, Head of "Javakhk Patriotic Union," Yerevan, 2012), Vahe Sargsyan ("Mitq" Analytical Centre, Yerevan 2012).

⁶⁸ Interview with Shirak Torosyan. MP, Head of "Javakhk Patriotic Union" (Yerevan, 07 June, 2012).

location of the region which is remote from Tbilisi and the poor infrastructure worsened the situation; nationalistic rhetoric which certainly instigated more tensions in this particular region and generally within Georgia.

Furthermore, Javakheti has not experienced serious conflict or major human rights abuses, but minor skirmishes, ongoing tensions and resentments, external agitation, and more serious conflicts in the South Caucasus create the potential for conflict in the district.⁶⁹ Hence, several factors should be taken into account, such as “*ethnic motherland*” or “*kin state*” which in this case is Armenia was involved in the conflict over *Nagorno Karabakh* and preferred not to exacerbate the situation and not to open a second front. The second factor probably was *the lack institutional capabilities*. Javakheti was not an autonomous region during the Soviet period and afterwards Georgia’s independence. This aspect could have impeded to consolidate more power in the region being dependent on the central government. *E. Shevardnadze’s* policy towards ethnic minorities turned out more flexible as opposed to *Z. Gamsakhurdia’s*. Later on the internal division within the Provisional Council also hindered future developments towards the future status of Javakheti. Another aspect was that there was no unique notion about the status of Javakheti. Some demanded independence whereas others were more prone to autonomy. However, according to Shirak Torosyan:

Organizations which ruled the movements, they never put forward the question of becoming part of Armenia or becoming separate entity from Georgia. Instead they wanted to reach a certain status, legal status which might have different names or illustrations like cultural autonomy, political autonomy. The main demand was the Armenian language would have a status of state language in the region and Armenian Apostolic church would have legal status.

Nevertheless, among the most common descriptions of Javakheti found in both journalistic and scholarly literature is that of a “potential zone of conflict,” “area waiting to explode” and in the more radical accounts “the second Nagorno-Karabakh”. And in conclusion, despite many contrary predictions, Javakheti managed to maintain peaceful

⁶⁹Eka Metreveli; Jonathan Kulick, *Social Relations and Governance in Javakheti, Georgia* (April, 2009), p.9.

interethnic relations and to survive in peace and relative stability. But in order to maintain the fragile peace and cooperation much has to be done in terms of minority rights protection and power-sharing structures within Georgia.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Natalie Sabanadze, *Armenian Minority in Georgia: Defusing Interethnic Tension* (European Centre for Minority Rights (ECMR) August, 2002), p.3.

Kvemo Kartli (Borchalo)

Azerbaijani population in Georgia is the largest minority. According to the general population census conducted on 17-24 January 2002 Azerbaijanis constitute 6.5%. However, under 1989 population census Azerbaijanis formed the third largest ethnic group after Armenians and Russians.⁷¹ The Azerbaijani population is predominantly rural, and dominates demographically in most of the Kvemo (Lower) Kartli province. These areas are situated less than an hour's drive from Tbilisi. Azerbaijani communities also exist in Tbilisi itself, the city of Rustavi, and the Lagodekhi district of Kakheti, near the border of northeastern Azerbaijan.⁷² The Azerbaijanis of Kvemo Kartli live in the vicinity of the border of Georgia with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Contacts between the local Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan are close and multi-faceted. While economically well-integrated in Georgia, the social and educational links of the Azerbaijanis are overwhelmingly with Azerbaijan rather than with Tbilisi, despite the geographic closeness of Kvemo Kartli to the Georgian capital.

The Azeri language is a Turkic language closely related to the Turkish of present-day Turkey, hence of a totally different language family than Georgian. Since few Azeris in Georgia speak Georgian, communication between the two groups normally has taken place in Russian. The majority of Azeris in Georgia belong to the Shi'ite branch of Islam, although in Kvemo Kartli the religion is rather weak and little distinction is made between the two branches of Islam (Sunni and Shi'ite).⁷³ Furthermore, the differences in culture are compounded by the exclusive character of national identities. Being an ethnic Azeri makes it near-impossible to be accepted as a 'Georgian' in the reigning interpretation of Georgian nationhood. The ethnic identity of the Azeri has not by itself been overly pronounced, but they are well aware of their links with Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani in Iran, and Turkey; moreover,

⁷¹ Mamuka Komakhia, *Azerbaijani Population in Georgia* (UNHCR, UNAG, 2003), p.4.

⁷² Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia* (Uppsala2002), p.209.

⁷³ Jonathan Weatley, *Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia* (ECMI, Working Paper #23, February 2005), p. 5.

their cultural Muslim identity is also present, though few signals of a politicization of religion is present.⁷⁴

Although the above mentioned differences, the historical level of conflict between Azeris and Georgians has been low. A short conflict erupted between the independent republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia in the 1918- 1920 period, but was mainly focused on the northern part of the border between the two, around Lagodekhi (in present-day Georgia) and Zaqatala (in present-day Azerbaijan) which were claimed by both republics. Parts of the Zaqatala area formed part of Georgia in 1918-20, but were subsequently transferred to the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan by Soviet authorities. In the Soviet era political activity among the Azerbaijani population was rather low and the low conflict level was sustained during the tumultuous period leading to Georgia's independence in 1991.⁷⁵

The tensions in the 1990's were only observed in the region of Kvemo Kartli mostly populated with the Azerbaijanis. Unlike other ethnic minorities the Azerbaijanis have been among the least politically active regional groups in Georgia. But this generally quiet picture concealed the relatively significant inter-ethnic tensions that existed during the late 1980s between Georgians and Azerbaijanis, which culminated in the 1990s. The tensions then led to the exile of several hundred Azeri families from Kvemo Kartli.⁷⁶ The main reasons promoting the forced migration were nationalistic rhetoric in Georgia and created harsh socio-economic conditions. Thus, ethnic minority representatives were not the direct victims of oppression but the factor of fear and unclear future prompted them to emigrate. The analyst of "Mitq" analytical centre Vahe Sargsyan stresses the point that nationalistic rhetoric found its way how put a pressure on the Azerbaijani population which was depriving the community from their land, knowing that the agriculture was the main source of the

⁷⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict : Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia*. (Uppsala, 2002), p.210.

⁷⁵ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict*, p. 210.

⁷⁶ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict* p. 209.

population's living. Furthermore, in the light of the aggressive rhetoric some people were fired from their jobs. There were also tragic cases of blowing up their houses. The extreme aggression was observed in Bolisi against Azerbaijanis under the pressure of nationalistically-minded influential group.⁷⁷

The comparably serious development was the demand of the "autonomy of Borchalo" was first heard then but this demand was not followed by any serious consequences like clashes. And currently the demand of autonomy is out of agenda. Even any demand of autonomy provokes negative feelings in population and their authors are identified with the provocateurs.⁷⁸ Yet these relatively serious ethnic tensions did not lead to large-scale ethnic mobilization among the Azerbaijanis, and the situation cooled down. Unlike in Javakheti, the inter-ethnic relations between Azerbaijanis and Georgians have improved considerably since then, and previously dominant suspicions have given way to relative harmony.

Another observation in the framework of Azerbaijani-Georgian is that when already Azerbaijani-Georgian relations were stabilized, the Azerbaijani government began to react painfully to any attempts of Azerbaijani population in Georgia to go against the Georgian government. During the visits paid by President Shevardnadze in the regions of Kvemo Kartli he was always ceremonially welcomed in comparison with other regions of Georgia. Furthermore, while the elections held in the regions with compactly settled Azerbaijanis Shevardnadze and his political party always got serious support while the oppositional political parties practically were left without votes at all. Such elections were the result of unlimited influence of President's representative in Kvemo Kartli as well as of disseminated information concerning the opposition parties and their leaders.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Mamuka Komakhia, *Azerbaijani Population in Georgia* (UNHCR, UNAG, 2003), p.7.

⁷⁸ Mamuka Komakhia, *Azerbaijani Population in Georgia*, p.7.

⁷⁹ Mamuka Komakhia, *Azerbaijani Population in Georgia*, p. 21.

Probably as have been observed the crucial factor for the stabilization of the situation in the Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia was the relations between the two presidents – H. Aliyev and E. Shevardnadze. Furthermore, according Sergey Minasyan (2007) the attitude of the Georgian state and the Georgian society to minorities that live in Georgia is influenced by the characteristics of relations between Georgia and the states that are “ethnic motherlands” to some of the minorities on the Georgian territory (Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Russians).⁸⁰ Exploring the particular case of Azerbaijani ethnic minority in Georgia, the external factor (Aliyev’s relations with Shevardnadze) smoothed down the existing tensions in Kvemo Kartli which never turned into a violent conflict but remained a page of history that is now avoided to discuss. Evidently, it was in the interest of Azerbaijani government to stabilize the situation with their ethnic minority groups in Georgia which could have had a negative impact in the future development Azerbaijani-Georgian relations.

The spillover of the conflict that already turned into a war in Abkhazia and South Ossetia could not be accepted by the Georgian government as well. Thus, the Aliyev’s leadership was regarded as a positive step which could help to ease the tensions in Kvemo Kartli. Another aspect is that Shevardnadze coming to power in 1994 realized that the nationalistic rhetoric under Gamsakhurdia’s presidency destabilized the country and thus he could not allow the continuation of such a policy which could have finally aggravate the situation in Georgia. As another possible answer why the tensions in Kvemo Kartli did not escalate and turned into an open conflict was because like Javakhk Kvemo Kartli did not have autonomous status either. Hence, autonomous status could have served as additional capability for the demands of the Azerbaijani minority in Kvemo Kartli.

⁸⁰ Sergey Minasyan, *From Political Rallies to Conventions* (Yerevan, 2007), p. 12.

Ajaria

The Ajarians consider themselves Georgian, the only difference is their religion. Furthermore, as the definition of ethnic groups states: ethnic groups arise out of the desire for culturally distinctive collective goods, which are valued due to the shared practices and ways of life (religion, language, modes of production) that culture represents.⁸¹ Thus in the above mentioned cases of Javakhk and Kvemo Kartli three components were present to characterize those groups as ethnic minorities whereas in the Ajarian example the main distinctive component was religion.

The main reason for tensions that were observed in the region was related with religious identity. The Muslim minority living Ajaria became a reason for the tensions. The situation remained tense until May 2004, Ajaria constituted a third area of uncertain jurisdiction within the country. Although Ajaria never proclaimed independence, it did not comply with the Georgian constitutional order either.⁸²

Ajaria was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century, and gradually converted to Islam, mainly over the course of the seventeenth century. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, the region came under Russian control. From 1918–22 it formed part of Georgia, and subsequently became an autonomous unit.⁸³ Religion was thus the main determinant of group status and the foundation of socioeconomic organization. Ajarians are confessionally Muslims but ethnically Georgians. They speak the Gurian dialect of Georgian, which contains many Turkic words. During the Soviet period language was regarded as an indicator of ethnicity, whereas religions were not. Hence, the Muslim Ajarians, speaking a version of Georgian, were not qualified as a distinct ethnic group. Soviet

⁸¹ Henry Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of states and nations In Eurasia and the World* (Cambridge, 2008), p.20.

⁸² Bruno Coppieters; Robert Legvold, *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution* (Cambridge: The MIT Press 2005), Chapter 1 *Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity* by Ghia Nodia, p. 39.

⁸³ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A study of Ethnopolitical conflict in the Caucasus* (Curzon press, Caucasus world, 2001) p. 163.

passports reported ethnicity but not religious affiliation. Forthwith, the vast majority of all Ajarians were recorded as ethnic Georgians, and there are no precise data for their numbers in Soviet statistics.⁸⁴

During the Soviet period when Ajaraia was already part of Soviet Georgia a policy of total assimilation⁸⁵ was implemented against the Ajarians in the 1970s. This policy continued into the 1980s, including Christianization efforts which were vigorously resisted. Nonetheless, the Islamic sentiment did not disappear in Ajaria.

“Ajars seem to recognize themselves as Georgians, while emphasizing their Muslim identity which separates them from the majority Kartvelian population.”⁸⁶

Again coming to the Soviet times in 1989, Ajaria joined South Ossetia and Abkhazia in demanding the Soviet government to be distanced from Georgian rule. The region kept the Communist Party in power. The Communists won 56 percent of the vote against 24 percent for the Round Table–Free Georgia bloc.⁸⁷ Ajaria had a distinct interest in keeping its autonomous status. However, Gamsakhurdia’s arrival in power in 1990 drastically altered Ajaria’s prospects. Gamsakhurdia advocated to retain the autonomous status of South Ossetia (initially) and Abkhazia, whereas he proposed the abolition of Ajaria’s separate status.⁸⁸

The first confrontation set the pattern for all to come, and the venue was the Autonomous Republic of Adjara on the Turkish frontier. While Gamsakhurdia did not send an army, he made it clear to the mainly non-practicing Muslims of Adjara that they would not be accorded any special status.

⁸⁴ Christoph Zürcher, *The post-Soviet Wars: rebellion, ethnic conflict, and nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York University, 2007), p. 213.

⁸⁵ The process whereby a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture (Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright, 2000).

⁸⁶ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A study of ethno-political conflict in the Caucasus*. Curzon press, Caucasus world, 2001), p. 164.

⁸⁷ Christoph Zürcher, *The post-Soviet Wars*, p. 202.

⁸⁸ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, p. 164.

“Adjarans! Remember that you are Georgians!” he famously declared in a 1988 rally in the Adjara capital city, Batumi. It logically followed that if the Adjarians were indeed just Georgians, then the “autonomous” nature of the province was redundant.⁸⁹

The mobilization of Ajarians was facilitated, if not initiated, by the executive of Ajaria’s Supreme Council, presided over by Aslan Abashidze. In fact, Gamsakhurdia had helped by persuading the deputies to elect Abashidze, a long-serving member of the *nomenklatura*⁹⁰, as chairman, hoping that the latter would assist in canceling the autonomous status of the region. Abashidze called Ajars, especially the Muslims of the region, to rise in protest. Tensions with central Georgian authorities ensued.

On April 22, 1991, pro-Abashidze protesters stormed administrative buildings in central Batumi, demanding the immediate resignation of several officials. The protests were effectively used by Abashidze to establish his own powerbase in the region. Gamsakhurdia, facing serious internal problems already in Tbilisi, preferred not to interfere in these events. Abashidze had thus successfully defended Ajaria’s autonomy against Georgia and his personal rule against nationalist Ajari contenders. After this, Aslan Abashidze ruled Ajaria as a personal fiefdom, convincingly taking the role as a guarantor that civil strife would not emerge from within (from a nationalist opposition) or from without (from Georgia which was increasingly plagued by ultranationalism and private militia groups). Abashidze made it very clear that he would not tolerate armed Mkhedronis’ entering Ajaria. Abashidze’s militias guarded the internal “border” with Georgia, and the police were granted special powers to combat crime.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008* (Central Asia – Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, June 2009), p. 17.

⁹⁰A category of people within the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries who held various key administrative positions in all spheres of those countries' activity: government, industry, agriculture, education, etc., whose positions were granted only with approval by the communist party of each country or region.

⁹¹ Christoph Zürcher, *The post-Soviet Wars: rebellion, ethnic conflict, and nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York University, 2007), pp. 202-204.

After Gamsakhurdia's overthrow in January 1992, Abashidze declared a state of emergency in Ajaria, closed the borders, refused to allow the newly elected Supreme Soviet to sit, and established his own ruling party, the Union for the Revival of Ajaria. When war between Georgia and Abkhazia broke out, Abashidze used it as a pretext for consolidating power. During the summer of 1992, he began to rule through a seven-strong Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which was composed mostly of his supporters. He ruled by decree, had full monopoly on military force, and enjoyed support from common people. He even gave weapons to common people and boasted military support from 35 percent of adult males in Ajaria.⁹²

Studying the case of Ajaria, after Georgia's independence in 1991 not the religious factor probably became a determinant of Ajaria to retain the autonomous status but because of at that time leadership of Abashidze and the overall created situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. While the period of Shevarnadze, Ajaria kept its position under the rule of Abashidze. President Eduard Shevardnadze had convoluted relations with Abashidze, both criticizing him and granting him medals while appearing reluctant to challenge his rule for fear that Ajaria would attempt secession. Tbilisi-Batumi relations appear to have been highly personalised between the two leaders, who never failed to find a compromise in a crisis. When Shevardnadze was weak, Abashidze invariably came to his support.⁹³

The particular case of Ajaria illustrates that although religious difference of the population living in Ajaria has been a determinant for consolidating more rights as autonomous region during the Soviet Union and after independence of the Georgian Republic, still Abashidze alone could not keep that status and control the region as a separate entity. However, it should be stressed that the autonomous status of Ajaria contributed to

⁹² Christoph Zürcher, *The post-Soviet Wars : Rebellion, Ethnic conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York University, 2007), p. 204.

⁹³ International Crisis Group, *Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?* (Tbilisi/Brussels, 18 August, 2004), p.4.

keeping the power in Ajaria under A. Abashidze's leadership. On the other hand he highly needed the support of external powers such as Russia to ensure his power in the region after the Rose Revolution. However, the Rose Revolution put an end of the power dominance of Abashidze, leaving his regime without any alternatives. In conclusion, we can observe that the involvement of the third factor was indispensable for keeping the power and for taking drastic measures. Without getting any support it was evident that Abashidze had nothing to do but accept Saakashvili's ultimatum.

Part 3

New Developments in Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria after Rose Revolution of 2003 and August War 2008

The following chapter aims to study economic, political and institutional patterns within the context of ethnic minorities after the Rose Revolution 2003 and explore if there have been any incentives for the conflicts to escalate since Saakashvili's presidency in 2004. August war 2008 will also be reflected in this section to see the developments it had on the ethnic minority in Javakheti.

The most significant changes are certain economic improvements and the extensive infrastructural programs that were carried out in Javakheti. The Georgian government invested 25 million USD in the rehabilitation of the road between Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki. Another important investment was 102 million USD provided by the American "Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund" in the rehabilitation of the Akhalkalaki-Ninotsminda-Tsalka-Tbilisi road.⁹⁴

The described socio-economic changes, however, cannot be discussed separately without political developments that they had. Thus, until the Rose Revolution, Tbilisi ignored the root causes of conflict and sought to defuse tensions by co-opting local leaders with profitable government positions and other economic incentives. However, when President Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in 2004, ethnic tensions escalated again, as the new administration attempted to integrate Javakheti by promoting strong state institutions and effective law enforcement bodies, closing the Russian military base and promoting Georgian as the state language for public administration and education.⁹⁵

The implementation of these policies, often poorly communicated to the local population, led to violent demonstrations in 2005-2006. Activists demanded autonomy for

⁹⁴ Hedvig Lohm, *Javakheti after the Rose Revolution: Progress and Regress in the Pursuit of National Unity in Georgia* (ECMI, Working Paper #38, April, 2007), p. 7.

⁹⁵ International Crisis Group *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration Challenges* (Policy Briefing, Europe Briefing N°63 Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, 23 May 2011) pp.2,3.

Javakheti, continued use of Armenian language in local public administration, improved ethnic Armenian representation in state institutions and an end to the settlement of ethnic Georgians. Tensions also grew with talk of the withdrawal of the Russian base⁹⁶, which had provided employment opportunities for some 1,500-2,000 men and actually was the main employer in Akhalkalaki, also served as a market for local agricultural products and defense against the perceived Turkish threat. That task was left for Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili. With the help of his newfound European and American allies accelerated the process of Russian military withdrawal from Georgia. Thus, from the point of view of the government, the main achievement in Javakheti was the complete withdrawal of the 62nd Divisional Russian military base in Akhalkalaki.⁹⁷

From one hand the withdrawal of the Russian military base meant for the Georgian government that Russia's role would become more constrained which was obviously in the interest of Tbilisi. On the other hand Russia could not accept that position in the South Caucasus which was to lose its leverage in the region, except keeping it in Armenia among three post Soviet countries in South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). However, the withdrawal of the Russian military base from Javakheti created a wave of dissatisfaction: few thousands rallied in Akhalkalaki in March 2005 in support of the base. In early 2005, Vahagn Chakhalyan, a local youth leader, brought young activists together around United Javakhet, which began by protesting the withdrawal of the Russian base. The rest of its demands were similar to those of Javakhet and Virk. Political autonomy was a demand at many of the rallies. Then-Georgian Defence Minister Irakli Okruashvili (now in exile) responded sharply, declaring the government would not allow separatism and would

⁹⁶ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian military bases remained in Georgia and Armenia—in Georgia partly due to logistical and strategic reasons, and in Armenia due to Russia's strategic considerations and Armenia's need for secure borders with its traditional enemy, Turkey.

⁹⁷ International Crisis Group *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration Challenges* (Policy Briefing, Europe Briefing N°63 Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, 23 May 2011) pp.2,3.

neutralize political groups promoting “anti-Georgian policies” and protesting closure of the Russian military base. Since the withdrawal of the Russian base in 2007, these groups have lost most of their influence and now have only a few dozen supporters.⁹⁸

Regional autonomy is no longer a demand. Local democracy, fair elections, language rights and rule of law are more important, and observers doubt radical groups’ ability to channel people’s discontent as they did in 2005-2006.⁹⁹ Many locals claim there is a heavy security presence. Political activists refrain from organizing public gatherings and demonstrations, because, “we do not want tensions here. If we demonstrate, then it will be reported as anti-Georgian, and this will spoil our inter-ethnic relations (between Georgians and Armenians)”.¹⁰⁰ They prefer to appeal to the Armenian and Russian media to discuss their problems.¹⁰¹

President Saakashvili’s government has continued its predecessors’ strategy of co-opting local leaders, including activists involved in the 2005-2006 demonstrations. It also maintains relationships with well-known local “power brokers” or “clans” co-opted in President Eduard Shevardnadze’s time, often offering jobs to ensure loyalty. A well-known example is that of Samvel Petrosyan, a former Javakhk leader whom Shevardnadze made deputy head of the local traffic police and from 2006 police chief in Akhalkalaki municipality.¹⁰²

Another development in the region which will have a direct impact on the region of Javakhk is the construction Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway which passes through Akhalkalaki and thus, the Georgian government views the project as a way to stabilize the region, giving an opportunity for the employment. However there are also concerns about the project in terms

⁹⁸ International Crisis Group *Georgia: The Javakheti Region’s Integration Challenges* (Policy Briefing, Europe Briefing N°63 Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, 23 May 2011), p.3.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Javakheti civil activists, Armenian and Georgian analysts, Javakheti, Yerevan, Tbilisi, January-March 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interviews, local political activists, Akhalkalaki, January 2011.

¹⁰¹ International Crisis Group *Georgia: The Javakheti Region’s Integration Challenges*, pp. 4,5.

¹⁰² International Crisis Group *Georgia: The Javakheti Region’s Integration Challenges*, pp. 4,5.

that the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad or the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railroad will increase the Turkish influence in the region, a situation which will not be in the interest of Armenia either. Such an opinion expressed Vahe Sargsyan – the analyst of “Mitq” Analytical Centre.¹⁰³

The impact of August War 2008 had irrevocably great impact on the region, intensifying Georgia’s sense of insecurity towards ethnic minorities. The fear that Russia may try to destabilize the country through Javakheti has increased, making the authorities more wary of losing control through decentralization or allowing Armenian the status of an official local language, before the region is more integrated with the rest of the country.

Nevertheless, the Russian influence in Javakheti diminished and is now largely limited to remittances, the Armenian and Georgian analysts suppose that the Russian influence may be illustrated through proxy groups and such an example they bring the case related to the alleged Belarusian NGO “ALAP” when the detention in January 2009 of two civil activists, Grigol Minasyan and Sarkis Hakopjanyan, local activists affiliated with the Armenia-based nationalist Dashnaktsutiun party. They claimed to represent a Belarusian non-governmental organization, the Association for Legal Assistance to the Population (ALAP), when they began work in Javakheti, allegedly to undertake an opinion survey that asked provocative questions about separatist movements and paid up to \$800 to an ethnic Armenian interviewer. They were arrested by Georgian authorities for espionage and later released on bail. Nationalist groups perceived this as an attempt to intimidate local activists, but Georgian authorities said they were freed after they cooperated with the investigation into what the government considered a clear attempt at destabilization.¹⁰⁴

Within the prism of Armenian-Georgian relations, Armenia has consistently played a stabilizing role in Javakheti, which it considers an internal Georgian issue. Successive

¹⁰³ Interview with Vahe Sargsyan. “Mitq” Analytical Centre. 26 May, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ International Crisis Group *Georgia: The Javakheti Region’s Integration Challenges* (Policy Briefing, Europe Briefing N°63 Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, 23 May 2011), p. 13.

Armenian governments have shown no inclination to clash with Georgia over Javakheti, and both countries characterize relations as excellent. Reciprocal visits by Presidents Sargsyan and Saakashvili are frequent, as are those by foreign ministers and lower officials. President Sargsyan summed up his position on Javakheti in 2009:

*“The logic of our policy toward Javakhetk [Javakheti] should rest on the principle of “integration without assimilation”. In this case, integration should presume the strengthening of the Armenians in Georgia as dignified and respected citizens of that country. I believe that recognition of Armenian as a regional language [in Javakheti], registration of the Armenian Apostolic Church and steps to protect Armenian monuments in Georgia will only strengthen Armenian-Georgian friendship and enhance the atmosphere of mutual trust. We should take a delicate approach to all of these issues but also be persistent and principled.”*¹⁰⁵

Thus, the later implications over Javakheti region show that after the Rose Revolution of 2003 certain changes can be observed: socio-economic and political. The Georgian policy towards the minorities became even more cautious after 2008 war. They are more engaged within the processes of *integration*, considering that social integration is a powerful way not only to alleviate inter-ethnic tensions, but to create an attractive climate for investment. This process is vividly illustrated in Javakheti schools when nearly all the subjects are taught in the State language.

Nearly the same picture can be observed within the Azerbaijani community in Georgia. Furthermore, after the Rose Revolution there were no tensions viewed among the Azerbaijani population since the Azerbaijani government preserved its good relations with the newly formed Georgian government and even deepened its cooperation among many

¹⁰⁵ Sargsyan, Serzh, *Speech delivered at The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (9 September, 2009) (Retrieved from president.am).

economic spheres (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline¹⁰⁶, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway). Thus, any tensions are not observed in Kvemo Kartli, only demands to have better economic conditions – employment problems due to the lack of command of the state language. Similar problem exists in Javakheti.

The developments of the Ajarian case are remarkable. Hence, from November 2003 to May 2004, Abashidze held onto power while engaging in an increasingly dangerous duel with Mikhail Saakashvili, the new leader who had overthrown Shevardnadze and succeeded him as president. Tactically, he first made the error of supporting Shevardnadze in the 2003 parliamentary elections. After the Rose Revolution, rather than seeking an accommodation with Saakashvili, he resisted dialogue and counted excessively on Russian support. Saakashvili successfully bet that the population of Ajaria was weakly committed to Abashidze and its republic's autonomy.

On 14 March, 2004 police and paramilitaries barred Saakashvili and his entourage from entering Ajaria. The country appeared on the brink of a new civil war as both Saakashvili and Abashidze reiterated their readiness to use force. In a bid to assert his authority, Saakashvili created a crisis centre, headed by Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in the nearby town of Poti, imposed economic sanctions on Ajaria, and demanded freedom of movement in the region for the Georgian government. He also insisted that Ajaria prepare for free and fair parliamentary elections on 28 March, disarm illegal armed groups and turn over to Tbilisi control of customs, borders, finances, and the port of Batumi. The crisis was partially defused when the two leaders met on 18 March, and Abashidze accepted the ultimatums in exchange for an end to the economic blockade.¹⁰⁷

Abashidze's departure (2004) left a power vacuum in Ajaria. The former regime ruled through a tight-knit system of patronage networks, within which one's position was

¹⁰⁶ Construction of the BTC pipeline began in 2003 and finished in 2005.

¹⁰⁷ International Crisis Group, *Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?* (Tbilisi/Brussels 18 August, 2004), p. 7.

dependant on the expression of full loyalty to the leader and his family. President Saakashvili retains a high level of trust and confidence but reform and establishment of a merit-based system is needed at all levels of the public service. The appointment of persons from Tbilisi to high-level positions in Batumi has caused some resentment among the local population.¹⁰⁸

Abashidze's peaceful departure was a significant victory for President Saakashvili. He swiftly moved to consolidate central control over Ajaria and to erase legacies of Abashidze's regime. Direct presidential rule was introduced in the region, and new elections for its local parliament were set for 20 June 2004. A special twenty-member Presidential Interim Council appointed by Saakashvili and chaired by the head of Georgian Railways, Levan Varshalomidze, was charged with handling the transition. Among its first acts was to abolish the post of chief executive, which Abashidze had occupied, and give Georgia's president an effective veto over top local political appointments, including mayors and district administration heads.¹⁰⁹

Hence, the constitutional law on Ajaria's status was passed after the minimum one-month period elapsed between publication of the draft and the vote. There was little participation in its preparation or debate. The law¹¹⁰ gives the president of Georgia extensive powers and oversight over Ajarian structures including the right to nominate the head of Ajaria's government. If the Supreme Council fails twice to approve that nomination, the president can dismiss it. He may also do this if it fails to vote on the ministers chosen by the head of the government, or if he considers that its actions threaten "Georgia's sovereignty,

¹⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, *Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?* (Tbilisi/Brussels 18 August, 2004), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, *Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable elsewhere in Georgia?* (Tbilisi/Brussels 18 August, 2004), p. 9.

¹¹⁰ The Constitutional Law on the Status of the Ajara Autonomous Republic, *Article 12, Part 2* (2004).

territorial integrity, or impede the constitutional activities of the Georgian government bodies".¹¹¹

Overall the situation in Georgia did not have a dramatic policy change on ethnic minorities but what is evident that Saakashvili's government become more directly involved in the policies that have a direct impact on ethnic minorities. The government especially after August War adopted more vigilant tactic in regards to ethnic minorities which is integration¹¹² process viewed as a way to avoid ethnic-tensions. Integration process is perceived by the Georgian government as first of all mastering the state language. However, this policy is skeptically admitted by the Armenian experts on Javakhk. For instance, Sergey Minasyan (2012)¹¹³ describes the current government's position as using administrative capacities against ethnic minorities, attempts of assimilation.

Another point is that certain economic improvements have been observed in the regions with ethnic minorities. The latter, undoubtedly, played a crucial factor to appease even little conflictual elements. Generally it can be said that Saakashvili managed successfully to control the situation in Ajaria and preserved relatively stable situation in Javakhk and Kvemo Kartli. Though speculation that Javakhk could become the next flashpoint in Georgia spiked temporarily around the August 2008 war, developments over the past five years: considerable spending on infrastructure to end the region's isolation and acquiescence to the use of Armenian in schools and public administration, have contributed to its increasing integration into Georgia.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable Elsewhere in Georgia?*(EUROPE Briefing Tbilisi/Brussels, 18 August 2004), p. 11.

¹¹² The bringing of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association, as in society or an organization; desegregation (Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, 2000).

¹¹³ Interview with Vahe Sargsyan ("Mitq" Analytical Centre, Yerevan, 26 May, 2012).

¹¹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Georgia: The Javakheti Region's Integration Challenges* (Europe Briefing N°63Tbilisi/Yerevan/Brussels, 23 May 2011), p. 14.

Conclusions

War in different areas of Georgia the 1990s could not be regarded as a reason for other ethnically conflictual elements to erupt on the territory of Georgia since for a latent conflict to emerge or escalate other factors should be taken into account. Disintegration process created a ground for conflictual elements to come forward. Thus, the absence of state institutions, economic crisis and nationalistic rhetoric could have instigated and in several circumstances was even lead to tensions in the regions of Georgia. Moreover, the three examples of Javakhk, Kvemo Kartli and Ajaria illustrated that if the conflict had intensified it would have paralyzed all the southern part of Georgia. The following research hence suggest for ethnic conflict to turn into open confrontation or even war, several aspects should be taken into consideration.

First, for the ethnic conflict to emerge and evolve into a war, the necessary factor is the support of “kin states” like for Javakhk Armenia and Kvemo Kartli for Azerbaijan consequently. However the study showed that Armenia had to deal with the conflict over Nagorno Karabagh as well as Azerbaijan. To open second front would have been costly for the parties and they chose instead to contribute to the settlement of the conflict in two regions like did Heydar Aliyev, and almost the same policy continues his successor – Ilham Aliyev regarding the region of Kvemo Kartli in Georgia. The consequent presidents of the Republic of Armenia–Robert Kocharian and later on Serj Sargsyan preserve nearly the same policy towards Javakhk, considering the conflict the internal problem of Georgia.

The second factor which remained the conflicts to the stage of emergence was that the external actors like Russia, US or EU countries were not interested in those conflicts. Reasonably without any support any attempts to demand or become an independent unit are mostly doomed to failure. The only role Russia played in the region of Javakhk was that 62nd Divisional Russian Military base was situated in Akhalkalaki. The factor of the Russian base

in Javakhk served as a restriction from extreme nationalists who could instigate an armed conflict in the region, especially at the time of Gamsakurdian government.¹¹⁵

The third factor might be considered the lack of administrative capabilities. The argument is that autonomous status could have fostered the capabilities of the region to demand independence and the conflict could have been turned into a war.¹¹⁶ Thus, for instance, the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia or another example in South Caucasus is Nagorno Karabakh possessed autonomy. They were self-governing bodies with their mini government branches operating in the regions. The administrative factor thus turned those regions more or less independent from the central government, which gave them additional capabilities and liberty in implementing the actions. However, Shirak Torosyan considers that when it comes to rough military-strategic actions thus, in this case generally the presence or absence of autonomy cannot have a crucial role. Javakhk and Armenia always displayed that they are ready to solve any dispute peacefully.¹¹⁷

Shevardnadze's policy provides with another finding. During the period of Gamsakhurdia the created tensions were result of nationalistic policy and rhetoric proclaiming “Georgia for Georgians.” It created unstable and insecure situation for the minorities living in Georgia. However Shevardnadze’s presidency displayed flexibility dealing with local elites and decreased the nationalistic rhetoric, probably realizing that it could not create a stable ground for the state of Georgia. And coming to latest developments a new situation regarding the protection of human rights and ethnic minorities began to form in Georgia in the period that followed the Rose revolution of 2003. On one hand, state mechanisms grew more efficient, especially in the social and economic spheres. On the other

¹¹⁵ Interview with Shirak Torosyan (MP, Head of “Javakk Patriotic Union,” Yerevan, 06 June, 2012).

¹¹⁶ See Appendix 1: Conflict Stages.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Shirak Torosyan (MP, Head of “Javakk Patriotic Union,” Yerevan, 06 June, 2012).

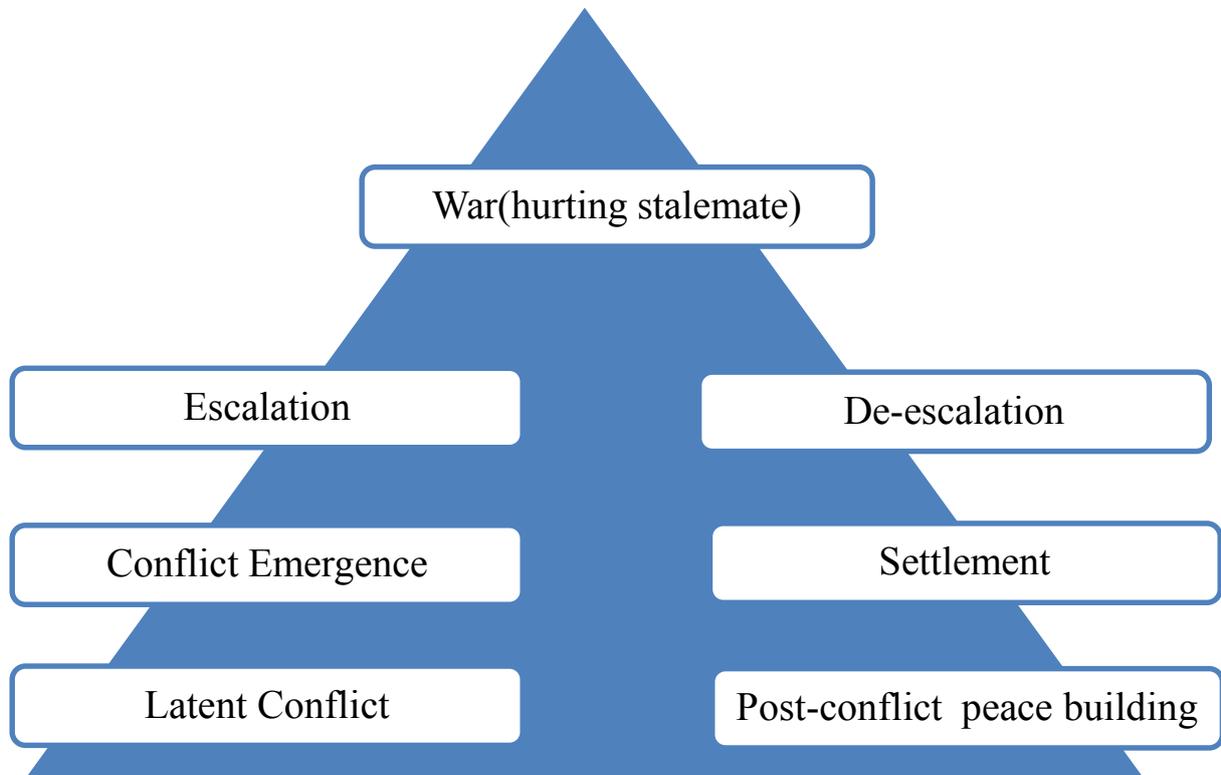
hand, statements made by many representatives of the authorities began to display signs of aggressive nationalistic rhetoric.¹¹⁸

Another finding is that for conflictual elements to elaborate there is a need to have strong local elites. Thus the conflict that was emerging brought to the appearance of Javakhk movement. As a result a Provisional Council of representative was established which was designed to counterbalance the nationalistic rhetoric, however the internal divisions that emerged weakened the movement.

And the last factor is that examining the period when the Provisional Council was established there was unified vision of the status. Moreover, it was the Provisional Council which rejected the demands of independence. Perhaps because the provisional Court realized that such demands were unrealistic and if they gave their support to such demands that would mean losing leverage.

¹¹⁸ Sergey Minasyan, *From Political Rallies to Conventions* (Yerevan, 2007), p. 15.

Appendix 1: Conflict Stages



Appendix 2: Map of Georgia's Regions



Appendix 3: Interview List

Vahe Sargsyan. “Mitq” Analytical Centre. Yerevan, 26 May, 2012.

Sergey Minasyan. Caucasus Institute. Yerevan, 06 June, 2012.

Shirak Torosyan. MP of the NA, Head of “Javakhk Patriotic Union.” Yerevan, 07 June, 2012.

Appendix 4: Interview Questionnaire

1. How would you describe the created situation in Georgia after independence, especially in regards to ethnic minorities when Gamsakhurdia came to power?
2. In your opinion why in case of Javakhk and Kvemo Kartli conflict did not happen per se?
3. What were the external and internal causes for the tensions and what were the causes for those tensions to be settled down?
4. As an internal dimension, how would you describe the policies towards ethnic minorities by Gamsakhurdia's and Shevarnadze's presidency?
The role of Russian military base for Javakhk.
5. How would you describe Armenian policy towards Georgia and towards Armenian ethnic minority in Javakhk.
6. Would you please say, what a role may play Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad for the Armenian population?
7. In the end how would you describe the recent developments in Javakhk and Kvemo Kartli (after the Rose Revolutio, 2003 and August War, 2008)
8. And the last question is: are there still conflictual elements present in Javakhk?

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