MIGRATION AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

GEORGIA'S ETHNIC HISTORY AND THE PRESENT MIGRATION PROCESSES

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Georgia's ethnic composition, which changed from one historical epoch to another, is a product of certain political, social, and economic factors. This led to certain migration trends that changed the size of particular ethnic groups. Georgian academic Vakhtang Jaoshvili identified the major stages in the process that led to changes in Georgia's ethnic composition: from the Middle Ages to the late 18th century; from the early 19th century to the establishment of Soviet power in 1921, and from 1921 to the Soviet Union's disintegration.[1] Today we can speak about the fourth stage: from 1991, when Georgia became independent, to the present day.

[1] See: V. Jaoshvili, *Georgia's Population in the 18th-20th Centuries,* Tbilisi, 1984, p. 209 (in Georgian).

First Stage: From the Middle Ages to the Late 18th Century

Throughout the Middle Ages Georgia remained the victim of its aggressive neighbors, whose regular inroads led to many deaths among the local residents and to their mass migration to the country's central areas. The vacated lands were seized by ethnically alien peoples. Muslims moved into Kvemo Kartli in the latter half of the 15th century; during feudalism Ossets left the Northern Cauca-

sus to settle in Eastern Georgia; and Greeks came to some of the Eastern Georgian villages in the latter half of the 18th century. The number of migrating aliens to feudal (normally self-contained) states was negligible, which explains the numerical domination of the Georgians in nearly every province. By the early 19th century, Georgians comprised four-fifths of the local population.[2]

Second Stage: From the Early 19th Century to Soviet Power

In the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, Georgia's ethnic composition changed beyond recognition for military-political and economic reasons.

Early in the 19th century, large non-Georgian groups were deliberately moved to Georgian territory. Armenians, Russians, Greeks, and Germans settled in Georgia in great numbers in the first third of the 19th century; they came from foreign states and from inland Russia. The inflow reduced the share of the Georgian population from 79.4 percent in 1800 to 75.9 percent in 1832.[3] Starting in the 1860s, the flow of migrants became more or less spontaneous.

At the turn of the 20th century the process gained momentum for economic reasons, while the military-political factor came to the fore during World War I and the first Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) when the larger part of the non-Georgian population preferred to leave. It was then that the share of Georgians gradually decreased: on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution they comprised no more than two-thirds of the entire population.[4]

This all started when the Russian Empire established its domination over the Georgian czardoms and princedoms: it deliberately replaced Georgians in the border areas with ethnic groups Russia believed to be more loyal.

After winning the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, Russia forced the Muslim Georgians of Samtskhe-Javakheti to move to the Ottoman Empire and filled the vacated land with thousands of Armenians who, aided by Russia, moved out of Turkey in 1829-1831. Under Art 13 of the Treaty of Adrianople, the Georgian Muslims had only eighteen months to move to Turkey, a Muslim country. Javakheti was virtually depopulated, which allowed the czarist government to move in 35,000 Armenians from Erzurum in 1830.[5]

Acting in accordance with the Treaty of Adrianople and on the request of General Paskevich, Nicholas I allowed Greeks[6] from Eastern Anatolia to settle in Georgia. They mainly settled in Borchalo, an area depopulated by the incessant inroads of Turkish and Daghestanian feudal lords. By 1830, there were 18 Greek settlements around Tsalka. The local Georgians had left these territories long before they were settled by alien groups. It was at the same time that Greeks from the northeastern vilayets of Turkey moved to the Dmanisi District.[7]

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[2] See: Ibid., pp. 209-210.
[3] See: Ibid., p. 81.
[4] See: Ibid., pp. 210-211.
[5] See: V. Lordkipanidze, *Historical Meskheti—Demographic Problems,* Tbilisi, 1988 (in Georgian).
[6] They spoke one of the Turkish Eastern Anatolian dialects and were called Turkic-speaking Urums. The Greeks who later settled along the Black Sea coast use the Greek Pontic dialect. Both groups are Orthodox Christians. For more detail, see: A. Mikaberidze, M. Shakhpazidi, "On the Dialects of the Greeks Living in Georgia," in: *Greeks in Georgia,* Tbilisi, 2000, pp. 129-177 (in Georgian).
[7] See: I. Garakanidze, "History of Greek Resettlement to Georgia (18th-20th centuries)," in: *Greeks in Georgia,* pp. 28-70.

In 1817-1818, Russia encouraged Württemberg Germans to settle in Georgia; they set up several colonies in the east of Georgia. The German sectarians were invited to Georgia in the hope of settling the depopulated areas, reviving the local economy, and acquiring reliable support in this part of the Russian Empire.[8]

In the second third of the 19th century, Georgia attracted mainly Russian religious dissenters and demobilized Russian soldiers. By 1865, there were 25,900 (or 2 percent of the total population) Russian settlers in Georgia. The figures for 1886 and 1897 were 42,500 (2.6 percent) and 92,813 (5.3 percent), respectively. The military (there were 21,113 of them) comprised 22.7 percent of the total Slavic population of Georgia. Slavs were moved in great numbers to Georgia, mainly to Tbilisi and the coastal towns, as well as to certain regions and to 21 villages.[9]

Some of the Russians who were moved to Georgia were religious dissenters—Dukhobors and Molokans. The former appeared in Javakheti in the 19th century. The czarist government feared the Dukhobors as an extremely protestant sect that threatened the state and religion. In 1837, they were moved to the Caucasus under an imperial decree to deal with the military-strategic, political, and economic problems. Sectarians were concentrated in two regions: in the southwest (eight villages of the Ninotsminda, former Bogdanovka, District) and in the east (in the Sagarejo, Signagi, and Lagodekhi districts).[10]

Assyrians and Kurds appeared in Georgia during World War I; they continued their inflow later, together with the Yezidi Kurds from the Ottoman Empire who settled in Georgia and Armenia.[11]

Stage Three: From 1921 to the Soviet Union's Disintegration

Under Soviet power the republic was inundated by hundreds of thousands of migrants who reduced the share of Georgians even more. In the 1930s, Russians and Ukrainians arrived in great numbers; the migration of Armenians and Ossets was also noticeable. The numbers of Greeks, Jews, and Azeris also increased due to the high birthrate. By 1939, for the first time in their history, the share of Georgians in the republic's total population was less than two-thirds. It was then that migration reached its peak, unrivaled either by previous or later figures. In 1926, non-Georgians comprised 51.7 percent of the urban population and 27.9 percent in the countryside.[12]

After World War II the number of migrants dropped; since 1957 the number of emigrants has been higher than the number of those who came to settle in Georgia. The share of Georgians began to climb: it was mainly non-Georgians who left the republic.

At that time, the number of Russians and Armenians mainly increased due to natural causes. It should be said that the natural growth rates differed from one ethnic group to another; the birthrate among the Georgians was lower than among other ethnic groups. In 1959 and 1979, the growing share of Georgians in the republic's total population can be explained by the migration of non-Georgians. According to the 1959 population census, Armenians comprised 11 percent of the total population; and in 1970, 9.7 percent. The figures for Russians were 10.1 percent and 8.5 percent, respectively.[13]

[8] For details about German settlements see: A. Songulashvili, *Germans in Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1995; D. Springhorn, *Germans in Georgia,* the Tbilisi Goethe Institute, Tbilisi, 2004 (both in Georgian).

[9] See: N. Zakariadze, "Czarist Colonial Policies and the Slavic Population of Georgia," *Demography,* No. 1, 2000, pp. 89-90 (in Georgian).

[10] See: V. Kozlov, *Russkie starozhily Zakavkaz'ia: Molokane i Dukhobortsy,* Moscow, 1995.

[11] See: D. Pirbari, "Kurdy na Iuzhnom Kavkaze," *Vostok i Kavkaz,* No. 2, 2004.

[12] See: V. Jaoshvili, op. cit., pp. 139-142.

[13] See: P. Gugushvili, *The Problems of Population Reproduction in the Georgian S.S.R.,* Tbilisi, 1973, pp. 16-17 (in Georgian).

Non-Georgians lived mainly in cities and towns, which explains the greater ethnic diversity of the urban regions compared with the countryside: according to the 1979 figures, the share of Georgians in the cities and towns was 62.1 percent, and in the countryside, 75.7 percent.[14]

Migration Today

In the post-Soviet period the republic's ethnic composition changed to a great extent. Indeed, while according to the 1989 population census national minorities comprised 30 percent, in 2002 (according to the population census), their share dropped to 16 percent (with the exception of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) of the republic's total population.

The changes were caused by emigration, the first wave of which was triggered by the rapidly deteriorating social, economic, and political conditions. Members of the titular nation and ethnic minorities left Georgia in great numbers.

In the early 1990s, ethnic minorities were virtually driven out of independent Georgia by the discriminatory policy of the political groups that came to power in the republic as soon as the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The nationalist rhetoric of President Gamsakhurdia—"Georgia for the Georgians" that gained popularity among the titular nation—suggested that the ethnic minorities were unwelcome in new Georgia. (They were given the status of "guests.") Discrimination never reached huge dimensions, but in some places (Dmanisi, Borzhomi, Tetri Tskaro, Gori, Akhalgori, Lagodekhi, and Mtskheta) Azeris and Ossets had to sell or simply abandon their homes and emigrate under the pressure of local nationalist organizations.[15]

Slavs emigrated in even greater numbers. Many of them were Soviet servicemen or civilians employed by military units. Starting in the 1990s, when some of the military units were dislocated, they left the republic en masse together with their families. Sixty percent of them were Slavs, mainly urban dwellers; nearly all of them moved to the Russian Federation. On the other hand, the Azeris, the second large group of emigrants, were mainly rural dwellers, however, they too wanted to settle in cities abroad. Over a quarter of the Azeris who left the republic in 1992 settled in the Russian Federation, others preferred to move to Azerbaijan. Seventy one percent of the Armenian emigrants, the third largest group, came from cities; 56.2 percent of the Armenians intended to migrate to Russia, while merely a quarter of the emigrants wanted to go to Armenia.[16]

Eduard Shevardnadze, who came to power in 1992, dropped the nationalist slogans, but the outflow of national minorities continued unabated. People were driven away by unemployment, low living standards, and vague prospects. Georgians also emigrated for the same reasons.

For linguistic (under Soviet power, Russian was the language of inter-national communication) and psychological reasons, ethnic minorities preferred to settle in the Russian Federation; some of the ethnic minorities migrated for national reasons partly because Georgia offered no future and partly because historical homelands looked very attractive: Russians left for Russia, Greeks for Greece, Jews for Israel, Ukrainians for Ukraine, Armenians for Armenia, and Azeris for Azerbaijan. It should be said that between the two largest ethnic minorities of Georgia, the Azeris were more nationally oriented than the Armenians. However, the Russian Federation, followed by the United States and Greece, was preferred by all ethnic groups.

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[14] See: V. Jaoshvili, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

[15] See: T. Gugushvili, *External Migration and Demographic Problems of Georgia (1990-1998),* Tbilisi, 1998, pp. 70-78 (in Georgian).

[16] See: R. Gachechiladze, *Population Migration in Georgia and its Socioeconomic Effects. U.N.-Georgia Development Program,* Tbilisi, 1997, pp. 37-38 (in Georgian).

In recent years, emigration has been mainly caused by social and economic factors: unemployment, low living standards, vague future, and political instability, while discrimination (the negative attitude toward ethnic minorities on the official and everyday level, no prospects for developing their native language and culture, and the poor satisfaction of their religious needs) plays a secondary role.[17]

There are circumstances that prevent emigration: some members of ethnic minorities are either integrated into Georgian society, or they have no money to move, or they belong to mixed families. Health and problems created by consulates play a comparatively smaller role. Significantly, the Azeris are unwilling to leave behind their households, some of them are patriots, while others are quite satisfied with the situation.[18]

According to the 2002 population census, Azeris are the largest national minority of Georgia; they live in compact groups in Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, and Shida Kartli, as well as in Tbilisi and Rustavi. As distinct from the rest of the non-Georgian population (which started flocking into the republic in the 19th and 20th centuries), the Azeris came in huge numbers in the latter half of the 20th century,[19] and they outstripped all the other ethnic groups of Georgia.[20] Under Soviet power, the Azeris of Georgia demonstrated a high birthrate. In 1989, for example, sixteen babies were born per 1,000 Georgians, while there were 28.6 babies per 1,000 of Azeris. In the early 1990s, the nationalists drew attention to this fact, while the Georgian press immediately responded with concern over the fast natural growth of the number of Azeris in Georgia.[21]

The Azeris were persecuted mainly in Kvemo Kartli; the rising nationalist wave caused clashes between Azeris and Georgians in Bolnisi and Marneuli. The Kvemo Kartli Azeris demanded that a Borchalo autonomy be set up.[22] The republican authorities fed up with the ethnic conflicts of the early 1990s wanted no other seat of ethnic tension in the republic. The problem was settled and the demand dropped for good.[23] Eduard Shevardnadze, who painstakingly avoided nationalist slogans of any kind and who was known as one of the friends of President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliev, managed to establish better relations with the Azeris of Georgia.

According to the 2002 population census, the number of Azeris is Georgia has dropped; today there are 284,761 of them in the republic.[24] Continued active emigration of other ethnic groups increased the share of the Azeris to 6.5 percent. While according to the 1989 population census, the Azeris of Georgia came third after two other ethnic minorities (Armenians and Russians), today they are the largest ethnic minority.[25]

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[17] See: G. Svanidze, D. Svanidze, "Emigratsia iz Gruzii i ee prichiny," in: *Migratsia na Kavkaze. Materialy konferentsii,* Kavkazskiy institut SMI, Erevan, 2003, p. 129.

[18] See: Ibid., p. 130.

[19] In 30 years, the number of Azeris nearly doubled: while in 1959 there were 153,600 of them (3.8 percent of the total population), in 1979 their numerical strength reached 255,700 (5.1 percent), and in 1989, it was 307,600 (5.7 percent) (see: *State Department for Statistics. Annual Statistical Survey of Georgia—2001*, pp. 37-38).

[20] See: V. Jaoshvili, op. cit., pp. 231-232.

[21] See: A. Totadze, "National Composition of Georgia's Population," *Eri*, 22 May, 1991 (in Georgian).

[22] The toponym Borchalo is derived from the Turkmenian tribe Borchalo, which moved to the Debed Gorge in the Middle Ages.

[23] The Borchalo Autonomy issue first appeared in the late 1980s together with the first signs of ethnic tension. The demand was formulated by the nationalist-minded groups with no wide popular support. As soon as the first waves of enthusiasm subsided, the issue was dropped for good.

[24] According to the organizations operating in Kvemo Kartli and the Azeri media, the real number of Azeris is much larger, somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000.

[25] This is caused mainly by the outflow of Armenians and Russians. There is emigration among the Azeris as well, but their high birthrate keeps their numerical strength high. According to the 2002 population census, there are 284,761 Azeris (6.5 percent), 248,929 Armenians (5.7 percent), and 67,671 Russians (1.5 percent) (see: *State Department for Statistics of Georgia. The Results of the 2002 First National Population Census in Georgia*, Vol. 1, Tbilisi. 2003, p. 110). According to the 1989 population census, Armenians came first in numbers (437,200 or 8.1 percent of the total population), then came Russians (341,200 or 6.3 percent) and Azeris (307,600 or 5.6 percent) (see: *State Department for Statistics. Annual Statistical Survey of Georgia—2001*, pp. 37-38).

Azeris form the majority in three districts of Kvemo Kartli: Marneuli with 83 percent of the Azeris; Dmanisi with 67 percent, Bolnisi, 66 percent, and Gardabani, 44 percent. The figures for Kakheti are lower: 32 percent of the Azeri population in the Sagarejo District and 22 percent in the Lagodekhi District.[26]

As mentioned above, according to the 2002 population census, the number of Armenians in Georgia has dropped to 5.7 percent against the 1989 figures when there were 8.1 percent of Armenians in the republic. The nationalist rhetoric of the early 1990s caused an outflow of Armenians to Russia and Armenia. Some of those who stayed behind changed their Armenian names to Georgian to avoid further problems. This happened before the 1990s, however in the early 1990s the trend assumed vast dimensions; the process stopped when President Gamsakhurdia was removed from power.

Armenians are in the majority in two districts of Samtskhe Javakheti: Akhalkalaki (94 percent) and Ninotsminda (96 percent); in the Tsalka District of Kvemo Kartli there is 55% of them. There is a large Armenian settlement in the Akhaltsikhe District (36 percent), while in Tbilisi they are the largest ethnic minority (8 percent). As distinct from the Azeris, Armenians are found in nearly every corner, but everywhere they are in the minority: there are 17 percent of them in the Aspindza District, 10 percent in the Tetri Tskaro District, 10 percent in the Borzhomi District, and 8 percent in the Marneuli District.[27]

The number of Slavs, particularly Russians and Ukrainians, has dropped considerably against the 1989 figures; the post-Soviet cataclysms proved to be too much for the Slavs. They, the Russians in particular, found it hard to adjust to the new, absolutely alien reality (there were noticeable anti-Russian sentiments). Emigration to the historic homeland was the only answer. In 1989, there were 341,200 Russians in Georgia; according to the 2002 population census, 68,000 Russians were left in Georgia, half of them in the Georgian capital.[28] As distinct from the other ethnic minorities, Russians were urban dwellers from the very beginning; few of them settled in the countryside. There are practically no compact groups of Russians. Today, the Russian population consists mainly of elderly citizens. The number of Ukrainians in Georgia decreased from 52,400 in 1989 to 7,039 in 2002; half of them live in Tbilisi; and a large group of Ukrainians lives in the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria.[29]

The Greek population also shrank: in 1989 there were 100,000 Greeks in Georgia (1.9 percent of the entire population); and the 27,000 Greeks in the Tsalka District formed the ethnic majority there (61.0 percent). According to the 2002 population census, there are 15,000 Greeks in Georgia (0.3 percent of the total population).[30]

In 1989 there were 6,200 Assyrians in Georgia.[31] According to the 2002 figures, there are 3,299 Assyrians (0.1 percent) left. They are concentrated in two districts of Tbilisi (Vake and Kukia); they also live in Kutaisi, Gardabani, the Staraia Kanda village, Batumi, Senaki, and Zugdidi.

In 1989 there were 33,300 Kurds (0.6 percent) in Georgia; by 2002 their number had dropped to 20,800 (0.4 percent).[32] They live mainly in Tbilisi (there are compact groups in Isani-Samgori, Gldani-Nadzaladevi, Lotkini), as well as in Rustavi and Telavi. There are small groups of them in Kutaisi, in the Mtskheta, Gardabani and Ozurgeti districts, and in Ajaria.

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[26] See: *State Department for Statistics of Georgia*, p. 116.

[27] See: Ibidem. The Armenian population is spread throughout four districts: 9,329 Armenians live in the Marneuli District; 3,124, in the Borzhomi District; 2,632 in the Tetri Tskaro District, and 2,273 in the Aspindza District.

[28] See: *State Department for Statistics of Georgia*, p. 110.

[29] See: Ibid., p. 113.

[30] See: Ibid., p. 116.

[31] See: *State Department for Statistics. Annual Statistical Survey of Georgia—2001*, p. 37.

[32] It should be said that in the 1989 population census the Yezidi Kurds were lumped together with the Kurds. In 2002, at the request of the Razibun Center of Yezidic Traditions, they were registered separately. During the latest census, 18,329 Kurds were registered as Yezidis at their request, while 2,514 described themselves as Kurds.

Conclusion

The process of ethnic changes in the Georgian population can be divided into four stages:

- *First*—from the Middle Ages to the late 18th century when non-Georgian ethnoses moved to Georgian territory on the invitation of the Georgian czars/princes to settle the land abandoned by the Georgians.
- *Second*—from the early 19th century to the advent of Soviet power. Migration waves (mainly forced migration) changed the size of various nationalities. The Russian imperial authorities moved large groups of non-Georgians to Georgian territory mainly for military-political and economic reasons.
- *Third*—from 1921 to the Soviet Union's disintegration. Industrialization and the industrial boom in Soviet Georgia attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants from all the Union republics.
- *Fourth*—from 1991, when Georgia declared its independence, to the present day. Political, social, and economic cataclysms drove away not only non-Georgians, but also Georgians; in recent times, non-Georgians have been leaving the republic for social and economic reasons.