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What is Impact of the August 2008 War to The Georgia's Democratization Process

Abstract. The First Independent Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) can be said to be the first step taken by the Georgian nation towards democracy. In the late Soviet Georgian Republic, when the Georgian nation was intertwined with political phenomena, the consciousness of democratization reasserted itself. After the declaration of independence on April 9, 1991, a very traumatic period was entered politically, and preserving territorial integrity became a priority issue for the Georgians. In the early years of independence, the newly established Georgian state struggled with ethnic nationalist conflicts on the one hand and economic development on the other. As a matter of fact, the state-building process was delayed and institutional reforms were only possible in the 2000s. The road map of Georgia's democratization process has been tried to be revealed. The August 2008 War is analyzed in terms of its impact on Georgia's democratization process. In this context, the impact of Russia's policy to maintain its hegemony on Georgia is discussed. The aim of this study is to analyze the reform efforts in the state-building process in Georgia and to discuss the role of the Rose Revolution in this process.

Keywords: Democratization, Georgia, State Building, Reforms, Rose Revolution, August 2008 War.

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რა გავლენა მოახდინა 2008 წლის აგვისტოს ომმა საქართველოს დემოკრატიზაციის პროცესზე

საქართველოს პირველი დამოუკიდებელი რესპუბლიკა (1918-1921) შეიძლება ჩაითვალოს ქართველი ერის პირველ ნაბიჯად დემოკრატიისკენ. გვიანდელი საბჭოთა საქართველოს პერიოდში, როდესაც ქართული ერი პოლიტიკურ მოვლენებში იყო ჩართული, დემოკრატიზაციის ცნობიერებამ თავიდან გაიღვიძა. 1991 წლის 9 აპრილს დამოუკიდებლობის გამოცხადების შემდეგ, ქვეყანა პოლიტიკურად ძალიან ტრავმულ პერიოდში შევიდა და საქართველოსთვის ტერიტორიული მთლიანობის შენარჩუნება პრიორიტეტული გახდა. დამოუკიდებლობის პირველ წლებში ახლად შექმნილ ქართულ სახელმწიფოს, ერთი მხრივ, ეთნიკურ-ნაციონალისტური კონფლიქტები და, მეორე მხრივ, ეკონომიკური განვითარების პრობლემა უნდა გადაელახა. შედეგად, სახელმწიფო მშენებლობის პროცესი შეყვანდა და ინსტიტუციური რეფორმები მხოლოდ 2000-იან წლებში გახდა შესაძლებელი. საქართველოს დემოკრატიზაციის პროცესის „საგზაო რუკა“ შეფერხდა 2008 წლის აგვისტოს ომის შედეგად, რაც გაანალიზებულია, როგორც უარყოფითი გავლენა საქართველოს დემოკრატიზაციის გზაზე. ამ კონტექსტში განხილულია რუსეთის მცდელობა შეინარჩუნოს პოლიტიკური გავლენა და ჰეგემონია საქართველოზე. კვლევის მიზანია გაანალიზდეს სახელმწიფო მშენებლობის პროცესში განხორციელებული რეფორმების მცდელობები და განვიხილოთ ვარდების რევოლუციის როლი ამ პროცესში.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: დემოკრატიზაცია, საქართველო, სახელმწიფო მშენებლობა, რეფორმები, ვარდების რევოლუცია, 2008 წლის აგვისტოს ომი.

Introduction . Although democratisation is a multifaceted process, factors and elements vary depending on specific conditions. The success and sustainability of the process depends on historical, cultural, socio-political and economic conditions. However, in this article, this is limited to the democratisation process of the new states established after the dissolution of the USSR.

As its simplest form, the concept of democratisation refers to the process of evolution, maintenance and deepening of a democracy. The development of a democratic regime is expressed by the process of transition from an authoritarian or totalitarian state to a democracy. However, socio-economic development and structural

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change in political institutions alone do not provide sufficient conditions to demonstrate the success of the democratisation process in the former Soviet Bloc countries. After the Soviet bloc countries were dissolved, the wave of democratization spread to this geography.

According to Huntington in his book “The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late 20th Century”, democratic transitions and democratisation, known as the third wave of democracy, is a global trend. He stated that the third wave of democracy started with the “Carnation Revolution” in Portugal in 1974, and later on, more than 60 countries in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa expressed the democratic transition process (Huntington, 2011: 1925). Especially with the dissolution of the USSR in 1989, the global rise of democracy, which Huntington calls the third wave of democracy, has given a new impetus to democratisation efforts. Countries that declared their independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union had a painful transition to a free market economy and democratic system. The transition to democracy and the reconstruction of the state came to the agenda simultaneously in the first years of independence in the Soviet bloc countries, and the political, administrative and economic institutions of the state had to be reconstructed. The simultaneous nation-state building and transition process revealed the difficulties of the transition process in many areas such as unemployment, poverty, economic problems, high inflation, education, health and social security. The liquidation of old institutions and the implementation of administrative and social institutions have brought many problems.

The difficulties experienced by the former Soviet Bloc countries in the democratisation process after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were defined by Adam Przeworski as “an attempt to break decisively with the past, both in the field of economics and politics” (Przeworski, 1995:5). Although the process of political transformation and the elements of democratisation differ in the former Soviet Bloc countries, nation-state building, political power, socio-economic development, citizenship culture and political tradition are accepted as elements of democratisation.

As democratization is a complex process of transition from an authoritarian or undemocratic regime to a democratic system of government. It involves the creation of democratic institutions, the protection of civil liberties and human rights, the active participation of citizens in political decision-making, as well as changes in cultural norms and social values. This process usually takes place gradually through transformational events such as popular uprisings or political reforms. The ultimate goal of democratization is to create a participatory, just and responsive society that respects the rights and interests of all individuals.

Discussion. The effectiveness of the democratization process depends on the existence of democratic institutions and processes, free and fair elections, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, and respect for civil liberties and human rights. These

institutions and factors are essential for the democratic distribution and exercise of power. Citizens' active role in political decision-making through voting, participation in civil society organizations, etc. is an important element of democratization. Citizens' participation in the political process will contribute to the adoption and implementation of democracy and allow for the development of different perspectives. Economic development is a key element of democratization. Reducing economic inequality, providing fair job opportunities, industrialization, technological development, equal access to educational opportunities for all individuals, and economic development will enable the development of democracy (Stepan and Skach, 1993: 1-22).

1. Democratization Process in Georgia

In 1991, Georgia, which declared its independence, had to deal with many problems after independence. Faced with the common problems of the former Soviet bloc countries such as nation-state building and the transition to a free market economy, protecting its territorial integrity became the most important issue for Georgia. In the first years of its independence, armed conflicts that led to the deterioration of territorial integrity led to a civil war.

The transition to a democratic regime began before the declaration of independence in October 1990, when Zviad Gamsakhurdia came to power after parliamentary elections. However, the continuity of the process has been interrupted several times. Indeed, Ghia Nodia emphasized that Georgia managed to remove the Communist party from power in the first phase through the 1990 elections. He noted that before independence, no Communist Party successor political organization was active in Georgia (Nodia, 2017). However, in the first years of independence, ethnic nationalist conflicts escalated rapidly in Georgia and preserving territorial integrity became a domestic issue. Likewise, Przewoski noted that in transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracy, maintaining territorial integrity in multinational societies is a serious problem (Przeworski, 1995). In the early years of Georgia's democratic transition process, Georgia's inability to achieve internal stability and the increasing conflict environment hindered the transition process. Gamsakhurdia, the first President of independent Georgia, was removed from office by a coup d'état in January 1992 for failing to ensure Georgia's internal stability. Shevardnadze attempted to establish a certain level of public order, but failed to ensure territorial integrity. The existence of ethno-regional divisions posed a problem for Georgia's democratization process. In the first years of independence, Georgia succeeded in purging elements of communist rule, but the democratization that took place in free market reforms failed to achieve the expected results.

Although the formal requirements of democratic statehood were put in place in Georgia with the adoption of the 1995 Constitution, these norms have been abused by the government and those close to it. Factors such as corruption, bribery and an

unstable economic environment have prevented the development of political, economic and legal reforms, which are necessary steps for democratic consolidation. With administrative failure, lack of internal stability and the emergence of domestic opposition, Shevardnadze took authoritarian measures to remain in power. Deteriorating performance in almost all policy areas stalled the democratic transition process and led to the interruption of international aid.

With the Rose Revolution, a new government led by Mikhail Saakashvili came to power and democratic consolidation, which had stalled since 2001, began to make progress. Saakashvili, who became President in January 2004, initiated the democratization process and accelerated the reforms necessary for nation-building, state capacity building, and the fight against corruption and bribery. The first element of the post-Rose Revolution reforms was to increase the commitment to democratization. Through democratic consolidation, Saakashvili aimed to increase the country's economic prosperity and ensure its territorial integrity (Mitchell, 2008: 2). With regard to ethnic minorities, Saakashvili took steps to increase ethnic minority employment in the civil service through "positive discrimination" to ensure "integration into the state apparatus". As Armenians and Azerbaijanis are settled in regional clusters, increasing the power of local governments would theoretically give ethnic minority representatives real political access to decision-making processes (Saakashvili, 10.07.2005). The second pillar of his strategy was to increase state revenues by fighting corruption and inject transparency and fairness into the government apparatus and the education system. Rising corruption under Shevardnadze paralyzed the Georgian economy, particularly in tax collection and customs revenues. By ending the corruption and bribery that permeated both Georgia's private and public sectors, the country could generate real tax revenues, which could then be efficiently spent on state infrastructure. Such spending would stimulate local economies and encourage employment. Objective judicial policies and a transparent fiscal system would further accelerate economic growth by inviting foreign investment (Saakashvili, 16.02.2005). Not only would this expanded budget help all Georgians, not just ethnic minorities, but merit-based hiring would replace the widespread practice under Shevardnadze of appointing close family friends or relatives of senior officials to public service positions (Saakashvili, 24.02.-2005).

State-building was the final element in the process of democratic consolidation after the Rose Revolution. In Saakashvili's interpretation, it was arguably the most comprehensive of the three, although it was closely tied to success in the other two reform areas. In the years following the Soviet collapse and Georgia's independence, the government had failed to establish functioning state institutions, had suffered a civil war that threatened its territorial integrity, and had established a system in which government officials abused their public positions and accepted bribes.

While Georgia was the most democratic country in the Caucasus region, the democratization process was interrupted by crises, ethnic conflicts and wars, which Huntington refers to as developmental processes. According to Huntington, nationalism plays a critical role in the democratization process. Especially in societies such as Georgia, where ethnic diversity is evident, extreme nationalism or ethnic discrimination can hinder the democratization process. With increasing nationalism, ethnic groups demanding their own rights and showing separatist tendencies can lead to conflicts and polarization of society. In countries that are in the process of democratization, and especially in states like Georgia, where political transformation in the process of nation-state building is quite intense, this situation calls for a careful examination of the growing nationalism and the fragile nature of national identity and institutions. This is because nationalism will lead to a tendency towards power in the process of forming national identity. In such cases, the rights and participation of different religious and ethnic groups may be ignored, while unstable institutions will emerge or the weaknesses of existing institutions will increase. However, Huntington emphasizes that fragile state institutions make the stability of new democratic regimes difficult and that institutions need to be strengthened. Increasing nationalism with the progression of the process may lead to increased tensions between different ethnic groups, as well as increased disequilibrium in the existing fragile state institutions (Huntington, 2011: 282-286.). In this context, nationalism was a factor that had to be handled carefully in Saakashvili's nation-state building process. The post-independence political developments in Georgia have in a way been an example of the "political degradation" and "pretorian regime" manifestations that Huntington argues that developing countries face in their modernization processes due to the weakness of political institutions.

In the case of Georgia, aid from international actors was seen by the Georgian public as a measure to stabilize a system that had become increasingly corrupt throughout the 1990s. However, the openness of the new government under Saakashvili to accept and even invite support for relatively better governance was perceived as an opportunity for international actors. Given the lack of progress in Georgia's democratization process in the early years of independence, Georgian elites and leaders did not believe that it could be achieved without Western support. In this context, the importance of international support and assistance was repeatedly emphasized and the importance of cooperation in democracy building and economic development was emphasized. The Georgians were convinced that if the West stopped supporting the democratization process, they would experience a complete failure not only in terms of reforms but also in terms of democratization in general. However, the strengthening of Georgia's geopolitical position has enabled a change in the balance in the South Caucasus. Especially in the early 2000s, European countries, especially the US, turned their attention to the Caspian energy resources, which made Georgia an important

point in the transfer of energy resources in the region. With the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline project, Georgia found a role in the big game of world politics. The policy to be developed in this context had to find an element of balance in relations with Russia, the US and European countries. However, with the undemocratic institutions of the Shevardnadze government, it was not possible to develop a strategy and gain momentum towards economic development. In this respect, the democratization process that started with the Rose Revolution had become essential for Georgia's development.

2. After the August 2008 War Democratization of Georgia

Especially when we look at the impact of the August 2008 War on the democratization process; The 2008 Russian intervention in Georgia and the August 2008 War, which took place within five days, showed that the political stability or instability of Georgia, which is a key country in international projects, has a global impact. After 2008, it became vital for Georgia to consolidate its independence, protect its territorial integrity and realize its economic potential.

In parallel with Georgia's growing geopolitical importance, the promotion of democracy became a priority. Likewise, Georgia had serious problems stemming from the economic deficiency inherited from the Shevardnadze administration and it was not possible to achieve national goals without the strong support of the international community. In particular, economically powerful states such as the United States, Germany, France and Switzerland provided support to Georgia in this regard. In the context of regional cooperation, Georgia received technical assistance from Turkey through NATO in military training, and alternative projects for energy transfer were developed to promote economic development (Üzgel, 2006: 309). In addition, the UN, the EU and NATO have helped Georgia to develop constitutional reforms during the reform process and provided support through training programs. The OSCE contributed to the democratization process through its election observation mission and the Venice Commission prepared advisory reports on the constitution. Indeed, while international donors suspended many of their aid programs due to the Shevardnadze regime's persistent reform failures, Saakashvili managed to convince the international community to give him a leap of faith with 850 million euros.

International support is seen as the key factor for the future successful implementation of reforms in Georgia. The prospects for reforms, especially in the security sector, were seen as dependent on the involvement of international assistance. In this context, Western support was needed for the training of military personnel and technical issues, and it was assumed that progress could be made through strategy development (Darchiashvili, 2005: 131-132). From the Georgian perspective, international support and assistance was seen as a key factor and an absolute prerequisite for the success of security sector reform. First and foremost, NATO has developed programs to train military personnel and provide technical assistance. A number of military

reforms were carried out as part of Georgia's accession to NATO (U.S. Announces, 05.11.2004).

However, Georgia, which had expressed its desire to join NATO and the EU, needed to adopt and implement democratic norms in order to integrate into these Western institutions. Both of these institutions emphasized the transformation of security and defense and were concerned with the political and democratic aspects of reforms. The norms required for membership include the role of parliaments in defense and security affairs, how domestic policies strengthen democracy and the rule of law, the degree of transparency and accountability, and the principles of separation of powers and judicial independence must be working. Georgia's aspirations for membership were so great that it needed to implement these requirements as soon as possible, with the help and cooperation of external actors.

While the war seems to have been the main cause of the slowdown in democratic progress in Georgia, there were deeper problems with the reforms themselves. First of all, Georgia's economic reforms were touted as market-friendly but did not have the expected effect. Saakashvili's government had argued that in order to survive as an independent state after the war, it needed support from the West, especially the United States. In this context, it was heavily criticized for the functioning and inadequacy of reforms until this period. The Georgian economy had entered a serious contraction due to both the conditions of war and policy implementation. In order to develop an emergency action plan in this situation, the priorities of the government were identified as the Singapore model; continuing integration with the EU; developing constitutional reform; diversifying economic relations; and defining Russia as an existential threat. Saakashvili has often emphasized that the most effective policy against the Russian threat is lasting progress (Saakashvili, 15.06.2010). Continued commitment to democratization became a priority not only for domestic purposes but also for ensuring national security. The possibility of continued Russian aggression was perceived as a threat to Georgia's very existence, and Western support became essential for the country's interests. Only with democratic reforms and progress was it known that the West would support the country, so a new constitution and reforms were urgently initiated.

In the aftermath of the war, this situation became even more acute, to the extent that Georgia saw Russia as a threat to its very existence. First of all, Saakashvili started to display a more constructive attitude in order to soften the tension between the government and the opposition before the war, to show the existence of a more reconciliatory political environment to the international community, and to contribute to the continuation of the democratisation process at the end of the war. Indeed, in the aftermath, the Georgian government responded to the effects of the war by promising far-reaching reforms that would put Georgia firmly back on the path of democratic consolidation. At a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jaap de

Hoop Scheffer, Saakashvili announced the ‘launch of a new wave of democratic reforms’ (Saakashvili, 16.09.2008). These reforms aimed to have a stronger parliament and more effective checks and balances between the branches of government; to strengthen the inviolability of private property; to make the media more free and impartial; and to make the judiciary more fair and independent. In the country, which was especially on the agenda with restrictions on press freedom and broadcasting, there was still no active political debate program on a TV channel. Indeed, Saakashvili acknowledged the lack of media freedom for the first time in his speech, stating that it “remains a challenge for our democracy”. However, as both Georgian public opinion and the international community and organizations have frequently voiced criticism of Georgia’s lack of judicial reform, Saakashvili stated that judicial reform would be initiated in order to build a more independent and fair judicial system. He also promised to increase the role of parliament, and in particular the role of the parliamentary opposition.

But more urgent than political and structural reforms, the government needed to repair the war’s damage to the economy. The war caused significant damage to Georgia’s infrastructure, with around 20,000 people forced to flee their homes because of the war. The war’s damage to the economy did not stop at the household level, but also disrupted international projects. Aid commitments increased sharply after the war in August 2008, as Saakashvili needed Western support against Russia and pledged to improve reforms to the NATO Secretary General. In September, the World Bank, the European Commission and the United Nations prepared a Joint Needs Assessment, which examined the impact of the war, assessed emerging needs and proposed a three-year recovery plan. As a result of this assessment, an aid conference was held in Brussels on October 22, 2008, and donors pledged \$4.55 billion in aid (UNDP assessment, May, 2010). This package aimed to protect Georgia from the combined effects of the war and the financial crisis, and was an important signal of Western support for Georgia’s future development.

By the way the 2012 elections were an important turning point in Georgian political life. The democratisation effort accelerated by the Rose Revolution increased the participation of Georgian society in political life and contributed to the formation of a more organised, more informed and more active electorate. The 2012 elections were the most democratic elections ever held in Georgia and for the first time the will of the people was dominant in the change of power in Georgia. In the process supported by the reports of international observers, first of all, the amendment made in the electoral law is an important step for the democratisation of Georgia (CEC, 2012). Saakashvili took a step in order to guarantee a democratic state to the West after the war and put the issues that the opposition reacted to on the agenda. In this context, the regulation on the number of deputies, which was made just before the 2008 elections, was amended before the 2012 elections.

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