

Georgia and Russia: A Tenuous Relationship

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American Revival: Citizenship and Virtue

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Introduction

Georgia is a small country between Europe and Asia that was unified as a kingdom in the eleventh century. Due to its prime location beside the Black Sea, it has always had interest from very powerful entities such as the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian empires. Unfortunately, such massive empires pitted against a country smaller than the state of South Carolina ended in multiple instances of subversion for the Georgians. The most notable of these instances for the purpose of this paper would be the two-time Russian annexation in 1801, and later in 1921. Those violations of Georgian sovereignty were not taken lightly by the Georgians by any means, as they rebelled against many instances of Russian authority. Eventually, in 1991, Georgia had enough of Russian domination and influence and voted on a referendum for independence. Georgia was one of the first countries in the Eastern Caucasus to declare independence from Russia, so that move doubtlessly inspired other countries close geographically to do the same. However, Russia only partly honored their independence, as they occupied separatist parts of Georgia such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia. To this day, Russia and a number of other countries do not recognize those provinces as a part of Georgia, but instead as separate and independent. Unfortunately, that is one of the reasons that the two have tensions even in the present. Additionally, Russian and Georgian culture and society have many similarities, and American involvement over the centuries has ranged from financial aid to equipping their troops. One of the U.S.'s more controversial stances were their support of Shevardnadze, a corrupt and fraudulently elected president. Today, the U.S. has formal diplomatic relations with Georgia and frequently imports and exports many different kinds of goods from them. America is also involved politically as well as diplomatically in order to ensure that free and fair elections occur.

Early Georgian Integration

In 1801, George XII, the Georgian king, begged Georgia to be incorporated into the Russian Empire. His predecessors had attempted to accomplish this but had failed. George wanted Georgia to be protected against possible invasions of empires such as the Ottomans and Persians. Unfortunately, the Russians were very unreliable in terms of support, bailing on the Georgians time after time.¹ George XII finally convinced Paul I to sign the decree, something that was extremely unpopular among the Georgians. Russia was enticed to sign because of Georgia's perceived value as an asset in the region, providing the empire with strategic and economic benefits. The Georgians hoped that despite Russia being the stronger force in the decree, they would be able to maintain their dynasty. Unfortunately, that was omitted from the document, but Georgian nobles were still guaranteed the same political and economic rights that Russians of that status maintained.

George XII died in 1800 and passed the dynasty along to his son David, who was forcibly removed by Russian troops. The Russians propped up a provisional government, headed by General Lazarev and split up into five different administrative districts. Lazarev, a blunt and honest man, was eventually assassinated by the last Queen of Georgia. That scene illustrates the chaos and volatility of the region, especially the strong hatred for Russia's military rule that was

¹ Stephen F. Jones, "Russian Imperial Administration and the Georgian Nobility: The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832," *The Slavonic and East European Review* vol. 65, no. 1 (1987): 2-3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4209431>.

prevalent there. General Knorring, the Chief Administer in that region, endeavored to replace all of the Georgians in positions of power and influence with Russians. He disregarded Georgian laws, creating bodies of government such as alien police boards and county courts that were partial to Russia.² Knorring did not hesitate to go directly after the Georgian people. In May 1802, he forcibly gathered Georgian nobles and pressured them to swear allegiance to the Tsar. He surrounded them with troops that were ready to arrest anyone who refused. That same year, they had enough and petitioned the Tsar for the return of the Georgian monarchy. Unfortunately, their cries fell on deaf ears, as the Tsar had no intention to restore an institution populated by what would be some of the most influential Georgians, the royal family.

By 1804, Russia had conquered the remnants of Eastern Georgia after centuries of Ottoman and Persian rule. The Russians also moved to defeat the Persian army in that same that year in a war that lasted until 1813. By 1818, life for Georgian nobles was not great. They had to prove their status by documentation. In order to be classified as a noble, they had to go through the corrupt court system, which employed countless Russian bureaucrats. The rules they followed were a mixture of Georgian and Russian. Additionally, children were not guaranteed the estate if their parents passed. Children had to go through the legal system again in order to ensure that they would get any of the assets passed onto them by their parents. The Chief Administrator stated, “Children of the nobility are not taken into service with the rights accorded to their status; not one landowner can sell, mortgage, or transfer his estate because the administration has decided to reinvestigate all the acts [claiming noble status] to see if there are any false ones among them”.³ That was purposefully done in order to decrease the likelihood of the noble class passing on hereditarily. The implementation of Russian influence in that form was directed by the new Chief Administrator in that region, General Paskevich. The Senatorial Commission of 1830-1831 “accused officials of swindling the populace and concluded that ‘misbehavior and disorder in the administration of Georgia exceeds all bounds’”.⁴

By 1832, it was evident that the Georgian nobility was unhappy with Russian rule and were desperate to win their sovereignty back. They viewed the Russians as trying to take away their position in the social hierarchy and merge it with the Russian service class. Clashes between the authoritarian Russian government and the administrative Georgian one caused much tension. When Georgia was annexed into the Russian empire, the nobles lost many of their long-enjoyed powers, which spanned throughout the political and judicial realm. The Georgian nobility, already forced to become dependent on the Russians, also had to come to terms with vast modernization. That modernization enabled minority groups such as Armenians to gain relative economic wealth in urban sectors. Additionally, changes in legislation and the replacement of Georgian civil servants with Russians cemented their dissatisfaction. Institutions in the ecclesiastical realm were affected as well.

Internal problems such as those led to the formation of an underground group, consisting of both aristocrats and working-class individuals. A commission looked into the workings of the group, comparing its workings to that of the Masonic Lodge, but concluded that their rules were harmless. The secret society, which congregated in Tbilisi, had one main goal. That goal was to topple the current government and create one without any Russian involvement. Nearby Poland

² Jones, “Russian Imperial Administration,” 11.

³ Ibid., 64.

⁴ Ibid., 65.

had gone through similar uprisings from 1806 to 1863, culminating in a revolution in 1905.⁵ The revolutionaries looked to that country for inspiration.

The group did not go as far as endorsing republicanism but emphasized the attractiveness of an oligarchy instead, since many of its members were nobles. The most popular idea for the type of government to be created was a monarchy that shared power with them. Another plan consisted of a rough outline of a government with an upper and lower administration, where the upper level would include the king and ministers, which would be princes, and the lower level would consist of district deputies who would deal with local issues.⁶ Uncertainty about the form of government to be instituted was a source of division within the group.

The group laid out a plan where all of the prominent Russian officials would be invited to a ball. At one a.m. that day, a rocket would be fired, signaling the end of their lives, as they would be killed along with any Georgians who resisted the revolution. The revolutionaries would then use church bells to summon everyone into the center of the town and force them to “swear allegiance to Georgia on a picture of Virgin Mary”.⁷ Additionally, the group would use spies to find defectors. In the case that soldiers tried to quell the rebellion, the group’s members decided they would spread rumors about a mandatory draft that would change their minds.

There were several reasons that the coup would not work. One reason was that the group did not prepare well. In order for it to go smoothly, many things had to get done, including mobilizing troops, collecting money, etc. The group also operated on assumptions like the fact that minorities living in Georgia would join the revolutionaries. Many diverse people groups lived in Georgia at that time, including Armenians, Azeris, and Jews. Those groups did not necessarily care about the posturing of the local government’s policies as much as the Georgians themselves did. Additionally, members of the group itself did not all agree on the methodology of the plan. Some preferred a violent assassination, whilst others preferred establishing good institutions, such as a boarding school, high school, and library instead. Either way, the group wanted to curb Russian influence and take back control of their country. Unfortunately for the revolutionaries, due to the aforementioned reasons, the coup was unsuccessful.

The Russians wasted no time in arresting the various culprits. The looming possibility of execution guided the culprits to give away information about their counterparts easily. The worst punishment administered was exile and in rare cases, demotion of rank. Only two of those exiled died without returning. The punishments may not seem to fit the crime, but there are several reasons for the choice of consequences. The main reason was that the Tsar needed people that would be loyal to him in positions of power in the territorial governments. He reasoned that by letting them free he would gain appreciation and loyalty, which in turn would create political stability for his regime. The Conspiracy of 1832 was the last significant attempt by Georgians to resist Russian dominance. They proceeded to accept Russian hegemony shortly thereafter.

Georgia and the Soviet Union

⁵ “Partitioned Poland: The legions and the Duchy of Warsaw,” Britannica, last modified 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/The-constitution-of-1997>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jones, “Russian Imperial Administration,” 18.

In 1918, the Russian Empire fell. There were several outcomes following that massive historical event. One major outcome was the independence of Georgia. The country proclaimed its independence on May 26th, 1918.⁸ The Democratic Republic of Georgia was recognized by the U.S. and many other European countries. Two years later, the DRG signed a peace treaty with the Soviet Union. In Article two of the agreement, Soviet Russia unquestionably recognized the freedom and independence of Georgia, renouncing all interference in their internal affairs.⁹ That independence proved to be short-lived. The Red Army completely disregarded Georgian sovereignty and invaded the country a few years later. The Georgian people resisted with large-scale resistance and demonstrations.

Just like many other countries under Soviet rule, the golden age of happiness under communism was short-lived. The Insurrection of 1924 marked the beginning of several uprisings and demonstrations against the ruling regime. Georgian nationalists were victorious in taking back several cities from the Soviets, but victory did not last long. The Red Army swiftly responded by massacring them. The nationalists fled to the Caucasus mountains, where they took refuge, and continued to attack the Soviet army for several years. Many revolutionary leaders fled to Turkey and eventually Europe. In 1956, during Khrushchev's rule, soldiers fired on demonstrators, especially those congregated at Tbilisi University. That incident resulted in dozens dead or wounded. On April 14th, 1978, over twenty thousand people marched in Georgia's capital city to protest the government's attempt to change the Constitution. The Russian government, led by Brezhnev, sent in tanks and other military vehicles to overwhelm the people. This demonstration marked the first time in Soviet history that people were able to change a decision coming from Russia, and the Georgian language was maintained as the official language. Many other demonstrations took place around this time, as tensions were high and the Georgian people fiercely disliked being under Russian rule.

February 25th in the year 1989 marked a significant day. That day was the sixty-eighth anniversary of the Red Army's occupation of Georgia. That significance served to heighten Georgians' commitment to make their voices heard, and that was exemplified by the remarkable appearance of over thirty thousand protestors that day. The protestors congregated in front of a major church in the Capital before preparing to march to Tbilisi University. While they walked, Russian troops began to attack them, killing twenty and injuring a hundred.¹⁰ The troops used tear gas that was banned in 1925 by the Geneva Convention, signaling that they prioritized their agenda over human life.¹¹

Road to Independence

Leaders of several nationalist groups were appalled by Georgia's treatment under the regime and constructed a declaration which was read before the UN Secretary General. They

⁸ "Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia," Supreme Council of Georgia, last modified September 4, 1991, <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/32362?publication=0>.

⁹ "Georgian Independence," Georgian Association in the United States of America, <https://georgianassociation.org/georgian-independence/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "1925 Geneva Protocol," United Nations, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/bio/1925-geneva-protocol/>.

petitioned for a UN commission to be created which would recognize Georgia's occupation by the Soviets and place them under international trusteeship. According to the United Nations Charter, Chapter 13, Section 76, the purpose of a trusteeship is to:

...further international peace and security; ...promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence...to encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all...to ensure equal treatment in social, economic, and commercial matters...¹²

Each of those aims are consistent with a burgeoning Georgia that is free of the strict binding allegiance to Soviet Russia. The leaders felt that the influence and intercession of the UN would help Georgia get to that point. Unfortunately, many leading nationalist leaders were arrested as a result of the 1988-'89 protests.

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and leaders in Georgia formulated a referendum on independence. The referendum asked, "Do you agree with the restoration of state independence of Georgia on the basis of the Act of Independence of May 26, 1918?"¹³ The original Act of Independence was instituted the first time the Georgians declared independence from Russia. The Act of Restoration of Independence was based on the referendum and faced overwhelming support. Over ninety percent of voters were present, and of those ninety, ninety-nine percent of them supported Georgia's independence. Problems of corruption, restructuring of the government, and lack of respect for basic human rights (like that of peacefully protesting against unjust policies) had caused the Georgians to be unsupportive of Russian rule. The referendum was successful, and for the first time since 1918, Georgia gained independence.

Domestic Issues and U.S. Involvement

In 1992, since Georgia was now considered an independent country, the United States began to have diplomatic relations with them.¹⁴ The year previous, Georgia started having issues with two provinces in the country. Abkhazia and South Ossetia had been, and continue to be, a source of much division.

Despite settling much of their foreign issues, domestic issues were still at play. Problems like internal corruption, election fraud and a bad economic outlook frustrated the Georgian people. Opposition "...charged that the parliamentary elections which returned Shevardnadze's government to power were rigged, and alleged that the president had allowed corruption to

¹² "Chapter XII, International Trusteeship System (Articles 75-85)," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-12>.

¹³ "Restoration of Independence of Georgia," National Archives of Georgia, <https://archive.gov.ge/en/sakartvelos-damoukideblobis-aghdgena-1>.

¹⁴ "U.S. Relations With Georgia," Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-georgia/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20established%20diplomatic,institutions%2C%20and%20enhancing%20global%20security.>

flourish unchecked.”¹⁵ The president, once popular with the West, began facing serious backlash for his contribution to those issues.

Shevardnadze was seen as a reformer; someone the West could influence and collaborate with. He helped end the Cold War and received money from Congress, 268.8 million from 2001 to 2003.¹⁶ Prior to becoming president, he had served as the foreign minister of the Soviet Union. Staunch support from U.S. policymakers proved to be misdirected, however.

Weeks of vigils and protests culminated in a meeting between the president and opposition leaders, facilitated by the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov. Shevardnadze agreed to step down peacefully and was replaced by an interim president. According to a U.S. National Security Council spokesman President George Bush telephoned acting Georgian President Burdzhnashvili [interim president] and promised that if it was necessary, America would intervene to uphold Georgia’s ‘sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.’¹⁷ The U.S. President’s support of the interim president reflected hopes that the new government would not follow the ways of its predecessor and delve into rampant corruption.

America continued their involvement in Georgia for many reasons. One major reason was because the U.S. wanted to construct a pipeline to bring Caspian oil to the Mediterranean.¹⁸ If it could not be constructed through Georgia, it would have to go through Russia and Iran, which were countries that were not friendly with the U.S. at the time. Also, Georgia is situated well geographically, since the country sits between the Black and Caspian Sea. The Black and Caspian Seas hold what could be made into millions of barrels in oil, which would result in an extensive amount of revenue.

The interim president assured the international community that Georgia’s new government would place the country on a course that was directed towards the West and democracy. Burdzhnashvili did not think that a relationship between Russia and Georgia was ready to be set in motion.

A few days after the resignation, America’s Secretary of Defense visited Georgia. Many U.S.-backed successors aligned with Colin Powell, America’s Secretary of State, in criticizing Russia. They insisted that all Russian troops must be removed from Georgia. At the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Powell announced that Russia must remove their troops from Georgia. He also cautioned them against supporting separatist leaders in mutinous provinces.¹⁹

South Abkhazia and Ossetia were two provinces that did not accept Georgian rule and wanted to stay under Russia. A third province, Adjara, were adamant in refusing to accept the

¹⁵ “Shevardnadze forced out,” Aljazeera, last modified November 24, 2003, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2003/11/24/shevardnadze-forced-out>.

¹⁶ Jones, “Russian Imperial Administration,” 4.

¹⁷ “Telephone Talk of Nino Burjanadze, Acting President of Georgia with George Bush, USA President,” Media and Society, Georgia Parliament, last modified November 26, 2003, <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/telephone-talk-of-nino-burjanadze-acting-president-of-georgia-with-george-bush-usa-president>.

¹⁸ Stefan Wolff, “Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” Encyclopedia Princetoniensis, Princeton University, <https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/706>.

¹⁹ Shevardnadze forced out.”

interim government and parliament. Civilians in Adjara planned to boycott the new Georgian government, calling on the Russians for help.

On November third, 2003, the election took place. It was widely recognized as a free and fair election by the West and resulted in the election of a new president by 96% of the population. The new president, Saakashvili, offered the same assurances as Burdzhaneladze; that he would place Georgia on a democratic path. Saakashvili was a U.S. graduate, having attended George Washington University and Columbia Law School. He was also a supporter of George Bush, who was in office at the time he was elected, but there is no evidence of the U.S. supporting an overthrow.

The U.S. recognized the revolution as an important democratic breakthrough. Prominent members of American government assured Georgia's brand-new leaders that they would provide as much support as the Georgians needed to assist in establishing long-term democracy. Examples of practical support include Colin Powell flying to Georgia for Saakashvili's inauguration and Bush calling the President himself. The revolution triggered a brief fourth wave of democratization that quickly spilled into other countries under Russian hegemony such as Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Lebanon.

Clashes With Secessionist Regions

With the resignation of Shevardnadze came the end of an era, as no longer was Georgia succumbing to the will of a hegemonistic greater power. The election of the new president, Saakashvili, was tangible example of the Georgian people rising up to decide their own fate.

Saakashvili decided that it would be in Georgia's self-interest to work towards better relations with the West. Another priority of his was to consolidate Georgia's control over separatist regions such as Adjara, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. The provinces had been in a relatively independent state during Soviet occupation and wanted to remain apart even after the Soviets had left.

Saakashvili began with attempting to subdue the breakaway region of Adjara. He succeeded in April 2004 and moved onto South Ossetia later that year. His ostensible reason was that he wanted to abolish the Ergneti market, which he claimed was connected to smuggling.²⁰ Unfortunately, with the closure of the market came further ostracization of South Ossetia from the Georgian people. That incident also resulted in increased violence, which caused peace talks between the two to disband. The ceasefire was brief and Georgian forces withdrew in defeat with very few gains made.

War began in August 2008, when the peak of the fighting took place. According to a Princeton Journal, "The conflict in South Ossetia led to around 1,000 people being killed, 100,000 being forced to flee, and extensive damage done to homes and infrastructure."²¹ The extensive human life taken from a what was a small-scale conflict geographically illustrates the high level of tension and volatility of the region. Regrettably, that was not the only instance of separatist violence.

Abkhazia saw a large population of Georgians immigrate into their territory in the 1900s. A Soviet census, conducted in 1989, stated that ethnic Abkhazians consisted of only 18% of the

²⁰ "Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia," EncyclopediaPrincetonensis, Princeton University, <https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/706>.

²¹ Ibid.

population there. Ethnic Georgians took up 45% and the rest were mostly Russians and Armenians.²² Demographics did not change significantly over time, as a census taken in 2003 identified only 94,000 ethnic Abkhazians in the region.²³ There were brief periods of violence throughout the decade, as the locals refused to accept Georgianization in their region. After Soviet rule ended, ubiquitous Georgian nationalism pushed Abkhazians to realize that becoming sovereign was their only way to “ensure their ethnic survival.”²⁴ That mindset led to continuous clashes even after Soviet withdrawal.

Preceding 2008, there was many sources of tension between the Georgians and Russia. In that year, Russia invaded the country to prevent Georgian dominance over South Ossetia. In August, war broke out that led to over 800 deaths and displacement of 20,000 Georgians from the region.²⁵ After the deadly conflict, Russians took over area surrounding the two regions, recognizing South Ossetia as independent.

On August 11th, President Nicholas Sarkozy of France presented a plan to the EU, which consisted of four principles. The draft was later amended at Russia’s and Georgia’s will. The final points contained: no recourse to the use of force, a lasting cessation of hostilities, unfettered access for humanitarian supplies (and occasional inspection), withdrawal of Russian forces to pre-hostility positions, and the launch of international discussions on security and stability arrangements of the two regions.²⁶ Unfortunately, Russia is still considered to be in violation of the agreement. Soon after, Geneva talks were launched and continued on for several years.

Economic damage as a result of the violence in Abkhazia was around \$11 billion.²⁷ The massive impact that the conflict had on Georgia sent a message to Saakashvili; that the regions would not waver in their commitment to secede from the country.

South Ossetia and Abkhazia Today

In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights exposed Russian practices during the war, including the “...torture... and other ill- treatment of prisoners of war, and the denial of Georgian citizens’ right to return to their homes.”²⁸ International recognition aimed to bring pressure on Russia to abide by the rules of the Six-Point Plan. The war was an unfortunate reminder of constant Russian aggression in the region.

²² David L. Phillips, *Implementation Review: Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement Between Russia and Georgia*, The National Committee On American Foreign Policy and Columbia University Institute for the Study of Human Rights, 6, August 2011, <https://www.ncafp.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/implementation-review-russia-and-georgia-aug2011.pdf>.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1-5

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-5

²⁵ Cory Welt, *Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy*, 16, Congressional Research Service, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R45307.pdf>.

²⁶ Phillips, *Implementation Review*, 9-11.

²⁷ “FACTBOX- Georgia’s breakaway Abkhazia region,” Reuters, last modified 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-ossetia-abkhazia-idUSLD28256520080813/>.

²⁸ Welt, *Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy*, 17.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are disputed territories to this day. The only countries that have recognized the regions as independent are Venezuela, Nauru, Nicaragua, Syria, and Russia. Ironically, those countries all have a friendly relationship towards Russia. However, no former Soviet countries have affirmed Russia's decision. Countries in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have also resisted, despite Russian insistence.²⁹ The limit of international support to Russia's supporters and allies illustrates that Russia believes that the sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is within its national security objectives.

In March 2022, South Ossetia's leader stated that their region "is planning to take steps in the near future to become part of Russia."³⁰ Since 2008, Russia has offered citizenship, financial aid, and stationed troops, all of which contribute to a favorable view of Russia in the region. South Ossetia planned to have a referendum on joining Russia on July 17th of 2022, but he was not elected; the next president put off the referendum until talks were held with the Russians.³¹ Abkhazia differed, however, stating, "Russia is our strategic partner, a dear and close state, but we in the republic [of Abkhazia] have no intention of joining the Russian Federation".³² Both territories highly value their relationship with Russia and plan to continue their cooperation.

Georgia in the Present

In recent times, Georgia has distanced itself from Russia and become more friendly towards countries like the United States. The two countries began doing joint military exercises in 2011.³³ Those exercises sent a message to Russia; that the U.S. was ready and willing to take their place as the dominant power in the Caucasus. The exercises also exemplified a shift in Georgian thinking about Russia. No longer was Russia viewed as a protectorate, but as an aggressive hegemonic state. The U.S. also provides much financial support to Georgia. U.S. Congress has given Georgia financial support since the early 2000s, totaling 535 million in 2019.³⁴ Trade between Georgia and the U.S. has also increased, with millions of dollars in total revenue being exchanged.

Despite seemingly heading in a different direction, fears of continuing Russian involvement still prevail. Since Russia's recent war on Ukraine, the number of Russian immigrants has increased drastically, from 148,000 in early 2022 to 160,000 in late 2023.³⁵ With

²⁹ "SCO Fails to Back Russia Over Georgia," News, RadioFreeEuropeRadioLiberty, last modified August 28, 2008, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1194578.html>.

³⁰ "De Facto Leader Of Georgia's South Ossetia Suspends Planned Referendum On Joining Russia," News, Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, last modified May 31, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-ossetia-vote-joining-russia-suspended/31876303.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Welt, *Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy*, 22.

³⁴ Ibid., 21.

³⁵ Sofia Gavrilova and Tornike Chumburidze, "Russian Immigration to Georgia Sparks Tensions Ahead of Election," Carnegie Politika, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 19, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/91295>.

the large influx of Russians comes the apprehension of heightened security risks. Fears about undercover Russian spies have caused public anxiety and gave opposition parties the opportunity to have their voice heard. One opposition party leader, Saakashvili, was president during the 2008 war with Russia. He stated that he would pass legislation compelling Russians to sell anything of value in Georgia and emigrate. The party in power, the Georgian Dream Party, opposes any concern about Russian immigration and views any opinions to the contrary as supporting ethnic discrimination.³⁶ Some view the current government as Pro-Russian and fear that Georgia will once again begin to drift back into the orbit of Russia.

Unfortunately, concerns surrounding Russian espionage were validated with the arrest of many Russian spies over the years. Spies were sent for various reasons, some of which included spying on Russians living in Georgia, by the Kremlin in order to spy on the Georgian people. It was not the only instance, as a Russian language school had also been established that used Russian propaganda in their school curriculum.³⁷ Incidents such as those only served to excite public hatred of Russians further. According to the International Republican Institute, opinions on the government's handling of Russia relations is divided, while 25% of the population believes that the foreign policy is Pro-Russian [the choice with the highest rate of agreement].³⁸ Another statistic places 79% of people as against Russians entering without a visa, registering a business, and purchasing property.³⁹ Though Georgians are divided about policy, a majority of them agree that it should be very difficult for Russians to settle in Georgia.

Georgia's dependence on Russia still continues, albeit in different ways. The primary method of dependence is economically. Georgia depends on Russia for much of its imports and export market. Products like Georgian wine, passenger cars, and oil are bought and sold with the massive Russian market. Revenue with Russia amasses over a billion dollars.⁴⁰ If Georgia distanced itself from Russia and began trading more with the West, their economy would be affected drastically. Not only do Russians purchase and provide products, but they also provide economic benefits through business. According to Transparency International Georgia, in the first half of 2023, 6,539 Russian companies have been registered in Georgia, and 21,326 have been registered since that war in Ukraine began.⁴¹ That is triple the number of Russian companies registered from the entire span of 1995 to 2021.⁴² Having higher amounts of Russian companies in Georgia also results in a higher number of Russian citizens living there. The Russian

³⁶ "Gavrilova and Chumburidze, "Russian Immigration."

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "National Public Opinion Survey of Residents of Georgia," Resources, Polls and Qualitative Research, Research, Learning, and Evaluation, Georgia, International Republican Institute, last modified April 25, 2023, <https://www.iri.org/resources/national-public-opinion-survey-of-residents-of-georgia-march-2023/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Russia (RUS) and Georgia (GEO) Trade," Russia/Georgia, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, last modified January 2022, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/rus/partner/geo>.

⁴¹ "Georgia's Economic Dependence on Russia Continues to Grow: January-June 2023," Transparency International Georgia, last modified September 29, 2023, <https://www.transparency.ge/en/post/georgias-economic-dependence-russia-continues-grow-january-june-2023>.

⁴² Ibid.

government has also provided for Georgia's welfare through Foreign Direct Investment. In 2022, Georgia received \$108 million from Russia.⁴³ FDI usually comes with strings attached, as countries do not want to see money poured into economies where their desires are not met. The spike in Russian dollars around the time of another regional war prompts questions about Russia's true intentions in Georgia; are they political, or merely economical?

Conclusion

Georgia's relationship with Russia is one to be seen through the larger perspective of a small, independent country wrestling with one of the world's biggest hegemonies. Incomplete victories and a history of bloodshed stain the pages of Georgia's past. The cycle of independence and annexation is very present in Georgian history. Presently, Georgia's independence is overshadowed by economic dependence on Russia.

⁴³ "Watchdog: Georgia's Economic Dependence on Russia Continues to Increase."

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