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## **ADJARA-GEORGIAN CRISIS AND TÜRKIYE'S ATTITUDE 2004.**

**Abstract:** *Due to its difficult geographical conditions and the intermingling of different religious/ethnic structures, the Caucasus has experienced major political and military events in many periods of history, and the political landscape in the region has changed rapidly. Although states such as the Transcaucasian Democratic Republic, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Georgia, and the North Caucasus Republic were established in the vacuum of authority created by the collapse of Tsarist Russia in World War I and the Bolsheviks coming to power, these states did not last long. With the Bolsheviks gaining power, these states came to an end. After nearly 70 years of Soviet Socialist rule, Georgia declared its independence. However, since it did not have a homogeneous population structure, it had to struggle with internal political problems and separatist structures. Since its establishment, the Republic of Georgia has struggled with the problems of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Adjara.*

*Adjara is an autonomous region within the borders of Georgia. The center of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara is Batumi. Batumi is an important and strategic city with its geopolitical position, port, underground, and surface resources. The fact that the Georgian State is Orthodox Christian and the local population living in the Adjara region is predominantly Muslim has been effective in causing problems between the Adjara autonomous region and Georgia from time to time.*

*The starting point of the Adjara problem was the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the 93 War (1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War), which resulted in an intense Muslim migration from the Caucasus and the Balkans to the Ottoman*

*Empire. With the defeat of Russia in World War I, the Ottoman Empire took advantage of the vacuum of authority in the region and regained the lands it had lost in the Caucasus. The Ottoman Empire recaptured Batumi on April 15, 1918, but on December 19, 1918, Batumi was occupied by the British. After the Turkish War of Independence, the borders were redrawn with the Treaty of Kars between the newly established Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on October 13, 1921, and it was agreed that Batumi would remain in Georgia. Since Adjara, in which Batumi is located, is an autonomous region for which Turkey is a guarantor under the Treaty of Kars and is located just beyond Turkey's Northeastern borders, close relations have been developed between Turkey and this region. Therefore, Turkey has had to take a close interest in the political crises or other incidents that the autonomous region of Adjara has experienced with Georgia. Of course, the most important reason for this is that we are both border neighbors and the Muslim people living in the region are under the guarantee of Turkey.*

*In this study, both a literature review was conducted and news about the Adjara crisis was scanned from newspaper articles. The statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, which is an archival document on the subject, were also used as first-hand sources in the study. In this way, the study is qualitative research based on survey and document analysis methods. In this study, the starting point and the outcome of the Adjara-Georgian conflict that started in 2004 and Turkey's position in the solution of the problem were tried to be revealed.*

**Key words:** *Adjara, Georgia, Türkiye, guarantor state.*

## ADŽARSKO-GRUZIJSKA KRIZA I TURSKE STAV 2004. GODINE

**Apstrakt:** *Zbog teških geografskih uslova i miješanja različitih vjerskih i etničkih struktura, Kavkaz je tokom historije prolazio kroz značajne političke i vojne događaje, a politička slika u tom regionu se brzo mijenjala. Iako su takve države kao što su Transkavkaska Demokratska Republika Azerbejdžan, Republika Armenija, Republika Gruzija i Republika Sjeverni Kavkaz osnovane u vakuumu vlasti koji je nastao raspadom carske Rusije tokom Prvog svjetskog rata i dolaskom boljševika na vlast, ove države nisu dugo trajale. Dolaskom boljševika na vlast, te države su došle do kraja. Nakon skoro 70 godina sovjetske socijalističke vlasti, Gruzija je proglasila nezavisnost. Međutim, budući da nije imala homogenu populaciju, morala je da se suoči s unutrašnjim političkim problemima i separatističkim strukturama. Od svog osnivanja, Republika Gruzija se suočava s problemima Južne Osetije, Abhazije i Adžare.*

*Adžara je autonomna regija unutar granica Gruzije. Centar Autonomne Republike Adžara je Batumi. Batumi je važan i strateški grad zbog svog geopolitičkog položaja, luke, podzemnih i površinskih resursa. Činjenica da je*

*Gruzijska država pravoslavna i da je lokalno stanovništvo u regiji Adžara pretežno muslimansko povremeno je uzrokovala probleme između autonomne regije Adžara i Gruzije.*

*Polazišna tačka problema Adžare bila je poraz Osmanskog Carstva u ratu 93 (1877-1878. Osmanlijsko-ruski rat), što je rezultiralo intenzivnom muslimanskom migracijom iz Kavkaza i Balkana u Osmansko Carstvo. Porazom Rusije u Prvom svjetskom ratu, Osmansko Carstvo je iskoristilo vakuum vlasti u regiji i povratilo izgubljene teritorije u Kavkazu. Osmansko Carstvo je zauzelo Batumi 15. aprila 1918, ali je 19. decembra 1918. Batumi okupirala Britanija. Nakon Turskog rata za nezavisnost, granice su ponovno određene Ugovorom iz Karsa između novoustrojene Socijalističke Federativne Sovjetske Republike i Velike narodne skupštine Turske 13. oktobra 1921. godine, te je dogovoreno da Batumi ostane u Gruziji. Budući da je Adžara, u kojoj se nalazi Batumi, autonomna regija za koju je Turska garant prema Ugovoru iz Karsa i koja se nalazi neposredno izvan sjeveroistočnih granica Turske, uspostavljeni su bliski odnosi između Turske i ove regije. Stoga je Turska morala blisko pratiti političke krize ili druge incidente s kojima se autonomna regija Adžara suočavala s Gruzijom. Naravno, najvažniji razlog za to je što su susjedne zemlje, a muslimansko stanovništvo koje živi u toj regiji je pod zaštitom Turske.*

*U ovoj studiji sproveden je pregled literature i analizirani su članci iz novina o krizi u Adžari. Također su korištene izjave Ministarstva vanjskih poslova Republike Turske, koje su arhivski dokumenti na ovu temu, kao prvostepeni izvori. Na ovaj način, studija predstavlja kvalitativno istraživanje zasnovano na metodama anketa i analize dokumenata. U ovoj studiji pokušala se otkriti polazišna tačka i ishod sukoba između Adžare i Gruzije koji je započeo 2004. godine, kao i stav Turske u rješavanju tog problema.*

**Ključne riječi:** *Adžara, Gruzija, Turska, država garant.*

## Introduction

Adjara is an autonomous region within the borders of Georgia. Adjara means „rainy place” in the Megrelian-Laz language<sup>1</sup>. The center of the Adjara Autonomous Republic is Batumi. Batumi is an important city with its geopolitical location, harbor, and underground and surface resources. Although the city, which was conquered by the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 15th century, fell out of hand for a while, it was organized as a sanjak affiliated to Trabzon province during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, and to Erzurum in the period between 1568 and 1574. Batumi, which later became an independent sanjak, was turned into an independent state at the end of the

<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Aydın, Acara, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Ansiklopedisi (TDVİA)*, Vol. Ek-1, Ankara 2020, 31-32.

century. Batumi lost during World War I and passed to the Ottoman Empire with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918<sup>2</sup>. The Ottoman Empire remained in this region for about three and a half centuries. The Ottoman Empire started to decline from the end of the 17th century, lost territory, especially in the Caucasus and Europe, and eventually began to retreat towards the Anatolian geography.

Between 1878 and 1921, the regions in the Caucasus changed hands frequently. The lack of authority created by the collapse of Tsarist Russia in World War I and the Bolsheviks coming to power, even though states such as the Transcaucasian Democratic Republic, the Azerbaijan Republic, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Georgia, and the North Caucasus Republic were established, these states did not last long, they withdrew from the stage of history with the Bolsheviks gaining power. During this period, Batumi also shared the fate of the region and changed hands frequently, and finally, in 1921, it came under the rule of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and lived under this rule for 70 years. After the collapse of the USSR, the Adjara region established its autonomous sovereignty, centered on Batumi; but since the early 2000s, it has had political disagreements with the Georgian government. It can be thought that the basis of these disagreements is that the Georgian State is Orthodox Christian and that the local people living in the Adjara region are predominantly Muslim and have close relations with Türkiye.

In addition, the political crises between the United States and Russia also affected Georgia. While South Ossetia and the Abkhazia region were supported by the Russians, Georgia's support from the United States played an effective role in the growth of Georgia's domestic issues. Unlike South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Adjara did not enter the struggle for independence and continued its policy of preserving its autonomous structure. While Adjara-Georgian relations were more moderate between 1991 and 2003, bilateral relations were strained with Saakashvili's coming to power in Georgia in 2004 and Adjara-Georgian relations have reached the point of hot conflict since March 2004.

### **The Beginning of the Batumi and Adjara Problem**

With the 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War (93 War), the Russian forces advancing in the Caucasus and the Rumelia region forced the Ottomans to withdraw from the war. At the war's end, Batumi, Ardahan, and Kars were left to the Russian administration. After the region passed into the hands of the Russians, the majority of the Muslim people, especially the people of Adjara, left the region and took refuge in the Ottoman lands.

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<sup>2</sup> İdris Bostan, Batum, *TDVİA*, Vol. 5, İstanbul 1992, 210-211.

The Ottoman Empire, by placing the Muslim immigrants from the Caucasus and Rumelia at strategic points for itself, changed the ethnic structure in these areas and opened the regions to settlement and Islamization<sup>3</sup>.

Caucasian people, who have warrior characteristics, also greatly benefited the Ottoman Empire in the supply of personnel to be used in the military field. Many Caucasian soldiers, especially Deli Fuad Pasha, Dağistanlı Mehmed Fazıl Pasha<sup>4</sup>, İsmail Hakkı Berkok<sup>5</sup>, Ömer Yaver Pasha, Fuat Balkan, and Yakup Cemil, served the Ottoman Empire.

Due to the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I, and its collision with the Russians; Caucasian people have been at the forefront of the struggle against the Russians with their grudges for years. In the last days of 1914, Laz and Acar bashibazouks also took part in The Special Organization troops recapturing Artvin and Ardahan<sup>6</sup>.

After the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia with the October Revolution, Russia withdrew from World War I, which had imperialist aims, and started to negotiate peace with the Central Powers<sup>7</sup>. However, after the peace negotiations could not get a result for a long time, Germany and the Ottoman Empire started an advanced operation against Russia. In this way, the possibility of recapturing the regions lost until the War of '93 arose for the Ottoman Empire.

The forward operation initiated by the Ottoman State in the Caucasus in February 1918 progressed very quickly due to the lack of a strong authority in the region and came to Batumi in April 1918. While Enver Pasha advocated the retake of Batumi, Vehip Pasha (Mehmet Vehip Kaçı) stated that Batumi should be given to the Georgians, otherwise, there would be close relations between the Georgians and the Armenians<sup>8</sup>. In line with the order of Enver Pasha, Batumi was recaptured by the Ottoman forces on April 15, 1918<sup>9</sup>.

However, just a few months after the Ottoman Empire recaptured Batumi, World War I ended, and the Central Powers left the war defeated. Batumi was first occupied by the British on December 19, 1918<sup>10</sup>, and then Georgian domination began in the region on July 10, 1920, under the shadow of the British<sup>11</sup>. Since Batumi was not occupied when the Armistice of Mudros was signed, it was included within the borders of the National Pact with the decision

<sup>3</sup> Justin McCarthy, *Ölüm ve Sürgün Osmanlı Müslümanlarının Etnik Kıyımı (1821-1922)*, trans. Fatma Sarıkaya, Ankara 2020, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Serkan Akıncı, *Dağistan Sıvırı Bölüğü ve Dağistanlı Muhammed (Mehmet) Fazıl Paşa*, Unpublished Master Thesis, Cumhuriyet University, Institute of Social Sciences, Sivas 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Elmas Zehra (Aksoy) Arslan, *Circassian Organizations in the Ottoman Empire (1908-1923)*, Unpublished Master Thesis, Boğaziçi University, Institute of Social Sciences, İstanbul 2008, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Micheal A. Reynolds, *İmparatorlukların Çöküşü*, trans. Yücel Aşıkoğlu, İstanbul 2016, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Westwell, *I. Dünya Savaşı – Resimli Harp Tarihi*, trans. Oktay Etiman, İstanbul, 2014, 189.

<sup>8</sup> M. A. Reynolds, *İmparatorlukların Çöküşü*, 211.

<sup>9</sup> I. Westwell, *I. Dünya Savaşı – Resimli Harp Tarihi*, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Mustafa Sarı, *Türkiye-Kafkas İlişkilerinde Batum (1917-1921)*, Ankara 2014, 295.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 534.

taken in the secret meeting held in the Parliament on January 28, 1920<sup>12</sup>. After the departure of the British from the Caucasus, a sovereignty race began in Batumi. Türkiye, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan claimed rights over Batumi and competed for sovereignty in Batumi<sup>13</sup>.

Even though Batumi tried to be included in the Turkish borders during the National Struggle period, success could not be achieved, and a solution was reached on the Batumi issue with the Treaty of Kars signed with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on October 13, 1921. According to Article 6 of the Treaty of Kars; Adjara gained the title of autonomy, it was decided that the center of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Adjara was Batumi, the Adjara Government, which was autonomous in areas such as courthouse, education, and health, including internal affairs, was connected to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia in foreign affairs and foreign trade<sup>14</sup>.

With this treaty, the rights of Georgian Muslims living in Adjara were guaranteed and Türkiye later became a guarantor state in the case of Adjara, as in the case of Northern Cyprus on 11 February 1959 in the Treaty of Zurich<sup>15</sup>. Türkiye's guarantee to protect the rights of the people in this region is to protect the rights of the Turkish and Muslim peoples outside the borders of their rights and to ensure their social organization and the election of muftis directly by the Muslim people to ensure their development within their religious and cultural characteristics. Türkiye brought its guarantor rights here to the agenda with Article 11. of the Treaty of Alexandropol (Gümrü Antlaşması) signed on December 2/3, 1920<sup>16</sup>. Article 2 of the Moscow Treaty signed on March 21, 1921, clearly stated the right to be a guarantor state in the Adjara region<sup>17</sup>. Article 6 of the Treaty of Kars, signed on October 13, 1921, and Article 2 of the Moscow Treaty are almost identical<sup>18</sup>. Agreements that define borders or contain peace do not have an expiration date, and there is no such statement in the treaty texts.

<sup>12</sup> Cevdet Küçük, Misak-ı Milli, *TDVİA*, Vol. 30, Ankara 2020, 173-175.

<sup>13</sup> Ferruh Özder, *Bolşevikleşme Sürecinde Ermeni-Gürcü İlişkileri ve Türkiye*, Ankara 2022, 268.

<sup>14</sup> M. Sarı, *Türkiye-Kafkas İlişkilerinde Batum*, 662.

<sup>15</sup> İlyas Bozkurt, Uluslararası Garanti Anlayışı ve 1960 Kıbrıs Garanti Antlaşması'nın Analizi, *Savunma Bilimleri Dergisi*, Vol: 43, No: 1, 2023, 117-153.

<sup>16</sup> İsmail Soysal, *Tarihçeleri ve Açıklamaları ile Birlikte Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, Vol.1 (1920-1945), 2nd ed, Ankara 1989, 21.

<sup>17</sup> İ. Soysal, *Tarihçeleri ve Açıklamaları ile Birlikte Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, 33. *Article 2 - Türkiye agrees to cede to Georgia its sovereign right over the lands of Batumi Liva and the port of Batumi to the north of the border indicated in the first article of this Treaty, provided that: First: The attainment of broad administrative autonomy by the people of the places referred to in this Article, so as to ensure the cultural and religious rights of each community and to have the opportunity to establish an agricultural lands regime in the above-mentioned places in accordance with their wishes: Second: The trade goods and all objects going to or coming from Türkiye via the port of Batumi are not subject to customs duties and without any obstacles, free from all kinds of taxes and fees, with the right of free transit, separately from Türkiye's private expenditures to make use of the port.*

<sup>18</sup> İ. Soysal, *Tarihçeleri ve Açıklamaları ile Birlikte Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları*, 43.

Türkiye-Georgia Friendship and Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1992 between Türkiye and Georgia as the first state to recognize Georgia's independence<sup>19</sup>. In this treaty, the Treaty of Kars, signed on October 13, 1921, was re-approved. The ratification of the Treaty of Kars means that Türkiye's guarantor rights continue in Adjara and its capital Batumi region.

In addition, by the rules of international law, the guaranteed rights given to Russia and Türkiye in this region with the Moscow and Kars Treaties were not given or transferred to Georgia<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, Georgia does not have the right to consider the issue as an internal issue and to take away the rights of the people here. However, although Türkiye and Russia were the guarantor states in the region of Adjara in Georgia in 2004, they did not use their rights.

### After the Soviet Era Adjara and the 2004 Crisis

With the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, many independent new states were established in the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. One of them is the Republic of Georgia. With the proclamation of the Republic of Georgia on April 9, 1991, internal problems erupted because of the ultra-nationalist policies of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Due to these conflicts, Gamsakhurdia had to leave his country, and Eduard Shevardnadze, the last Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, came to power in 1992. During the 1990s, there was a stability problem due to the supporters of Gamsakhurdia and the desire for independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the country, and the situation reached a level of war from time to time. About 20,000 people died in the Abkhazian War, and 250,000 to 260,000 people had to emigrate. The conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia between 1992-1993 were named the *Georgian Civil War*<sup>21</sup>.

In April 1991, there were also problems in the Adjara region. However, while South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which separate the problems in the Adjara region from South Ossetia and Abkhazia, want to leave Georgia; there is no such expectation in the Adjara region. Adjara wanted to regain its autonomous region privilege, which had existed since 1921. In addition, the fact that Adjara is geographically far from the Russian border compared to Abkhazia and South Ossetia made the possibility of Russian intervention difficult.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmet Akter, Türkiye'nin Garantörlük Hakları Hakkında Bir Değerlendirme, *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol: 111, No: 218, 2015, 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Selim Dursun, *Bölgesel Devlet ve Özerklik Kavramları Bağlamında Gürcistan ve Acara Özerk Cumhuriyeti*, Unpublished Master Thesis, Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Sakarya 2011, 111.

<sup>21</sup> Faruk Sönmezoglu, *Uluslararası İlişkiler Sözlüğü*, İstanbul 1996, 208; Nino Jintcharadze, *Gürcistan Gül Devrimi ve Dış Politik Sonuçları*, Unpublished Master Thesis, İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, İstanbul 2014, 7-14; Yelda Demirağ, *Bağımsızlıktan Kadife Devrime Türkiye-Gürcistan İlişkileri*, *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No 7, Fall 2005, 129.

In the Constitution adopted in 1995 in Georgia, there was no article referring to the „autonomous” structure of the Adjara region<sup>22</sup>. The article of law, which guarantees the autonomous structure of Adjara, was adopted by the Georgian Parliament on 20 April 2000. According to the accepted law no. 260; with the additions made to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 55<sup>th</sup>, 67<sup>th</sup>, and 89<sup>th</sup> articles of the Georgian Constitution, the status of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara has been determined<sup>23</sup>.

The elections held in Georgia on November 2, 2003, are a harbinger of the approaching tense environment. *New Georgia Alliance* headed by Eduard Shevardnadze; the „United National Movement” represented by Mikhail Saakashvili; „Burjanadze-Democrats”, the party of Nino Burjanadze, who is the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, and Zurab Jvanaia, the former Speaker of the Parliament, and „the Democratic Development Bloc” led by Aslan Abashidze joined. In addition, the „Labour Party” led by Shalva Natelashvili, and the „New Rightists” led by Pikria Chikhladze participated in the parliamentary elections<sup>24</sup>.

The allegation of fraud in the elections fell like a bomb on Georgia's agenda<sup>25</sup>. At the end of the elections, it was determined that an irregularity was made in the form of changing the election results as a result of the fact that the New Georgia Alliance led by Shevardnadze received more votes than the ballot box results minutes. According to the unofficial first results of the elections, it was said that the *Burjanadze-Democrats* alliance led the election, while President Shevardnadze claimed that *the most democratic, transparent, and honest election in the history of the country was held*<sup>26</sup>. Due to the fraudulent election results, international observers and the opposition demanded a renewal of the election<sup>27</sup>.

From November 2, 2003, to November 20, 2003, the waters in Georgia did not calm down and the objections to the election results continued to increase day by day throughout the country. Moreover, the election objections supported abroad did not prevent President Shevardnadze from announcing that the parliament would open its first session on 22 November<sup>28</sup>. The opponents and their supporters, who came to Tbilisi on November 21, gathered in Freedom Square and announced the *Velvet Revolution*, which was later also called the *Roses Revolution*<sup>29</sup>.

On November 22, opposition supporters led by Mikhail Saakashvili raided the General Assembly of the Parliament while Shevardnadze was giving

<sup>22</sup> Atıf Abasov, *Sovyetler Sonrası Gürcistan'ın Dış Politikasına Yön Veren Etkenler*, Unpublished Master Thesis, Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Sakarya 2021, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Fahrettin Murtazaoglu, Acaralılarının Siyasi Özerklik Hakkının Süjesi Haline Gelmeleri ve Türkiye'nin Bu Sürece Etkisi, *Bilig*, No: 29, 2004, 67.

<sup>24</sup> N. Jintcharadze, *Gürcistan Güç Devrimi ve Dış Politik Sonuçları* 29.

<sup>25</sup> <http://arsiv.ntv.com.tr/news/242214.asp>, (Accessed:3/28/ 2023).

<sup>26</sup> “Şevardnadze'yi Zorlayan Sonuç”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 4 November 2003,10.

<sup>27</sup> N Jintcharadze, *Gürcistan Güç Devrimi ve Dış Politik Sonuçları*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 31-35.

<sup>29</sup> Dimitri Trenin, The Velvet Revolution and Russian-Georgian Relations, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January - March 2004), 142-144.



a speech, and then went to the Presidency and set fire to Shevardnadze's office. While around 40,000 pro-opposition protesters were protesting in the streets, approximately 5,000 people from the Adjara Autonomous Region came to support Shevardnadze<sup>30</sup>.

While the protests about election fraud on November 23, 2003, continued to increase in Georgia, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement which has this title: „On the developments that emerged after the parliamentary elections held in Georgia on November 2, 2003; arousing concerns in Georgia and its neighbor Türkiye”. In this statement, the parties were warned to act responsibly and with restraint for the unity and welfare of Georgia and the people of Georgia<sup>31</sup>.

At the same time, on November 23, 2003, President Shevardnadze, who could not fulfill the promises he made in the field of democracy, could not prevent bribery and corruption, was seen as responsible for the energy bottleneck and the poverty of the people, and was thought to have corrupted in the elections, met with the opposition through the mediation of Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. Shevardnadze resigned after meeting with opposition leaders Saakashvili, Burjanadze, and Zhvania alongside mediator Ivanov<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the tension that had increased since November 2, 2003, came to an end and Shevardnadze, who had been in office since 1992, left the seat.

After Shevardnadze's resignation, Nino Burjanadze, the Speaker of the Parliament, took over the office temporarily, while the court declared that the November 2 elections were invalid, and it was stated that the elections would be renewed within 45 days. The President of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Aslan Abashidze, was greatly disturbed by Shevardnadze's resignation and announced that they would declare a state of emergency in Batumi and would not establish relations with the new administration<sup>33</sup>.

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement titled „About the turmoil that emerged after the Parliamentary elections held in Georgia on November 2, 2003.” In this statement, appreciated the prudent attitude of the parties and the people of Georgia, welcomed the renewal of the elections, and stated that determined to maintain friendly relations with Georgia<sup>34</sup>.

After the invalidity of the questionable November 2 elections was confirmed by the court, Georgia decided to hold an extraordinary election at the beginning of 2004. 2004 was a very active year for both Türkiye and the world. With the referendum to be held in Cyprus to join the European Union, the occupation of Iraq by the USA and its allies, the rising tension in the Kurdish

<sup>30</sup> “Gürcistan’da Muhalefet Darbesi”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 23 November 2003, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 23 November 2003, No: 203.

<sup>32</sup> “Şevardnadze Sahneden Çekildi”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 24 November 2003, 10; Demirağ Y, Bağımsızlıktan Kadife Devrime, 138-139; N. Jintcharadze, *Gürcistan Gül Devrimi ve Dış Politik Sonuçları*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> “Şevardnadze Sahneden Çekildi”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 2003. 24 November, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 24 November 2003, No: 204.

region of Iraq, and the conflicts between Israel and Palestine, the political tension in Georgia increased towards spring.

The repetition of the elections held on November 2, 2003, in Georgia, was held on January 4, 2004. This election was expressed as a *one-candidate* election since candidates other than Saakashvili were not recognized by the public. While there was participation in the elections in Adjara, one of the autonomous regions known for its opposition to Saakashvili, the election was boycotted in South Ossetia and Abkhazia<sup>35</sup>.

In the elections held on January 4, Saakashvili was the winner with 56% of the votes, and he became the head of state on January 25, 2004<sup>36</sup>. However, Saakashvili's sitting on the chair did not prevent the continuation of the discussions. The participation of US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Saakashvili's swearing-in ceremony, the resignation of Former President Shevardnadze being called the „Velvet Revolution“, and the Adjara administration seeing Saakashvili's power as a threat to the Autonomous Region of Adjara and increasing security at the borders<sup>37</sup>. It is a sign that the waters in Georgia will not calm down.

Two days before January 25, Saakashvili's message to Russia about „not mixing the autonomous regions in his country“ showed that the tension between the USA and Russia would continue in Georgia<sup>38</sup>. The tension between these two countries will not only be limited to Adjara but will also be the trigger of the war between Georgia and South Ossetia in 2008.

As tensions rose in Georgia, it was announced that Georgian Foreign Minister Tedo Japaridze would come to Türkiye to hold talks upon the invitation of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>39</sup>. It is understood from this statement that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) Government, which came to power on November 3, 2002, in Türkiye, supported Saakashvili in the Georgian issue. While the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs made statements only to lower the tension in the protests that the elections were rigged, and Shevardnadze left power; did not express itself in any way. The reason why he did not specify a party at that time can be thought of as the uncertainty of how the status quo would work. Because the AKP Government has paid attention to making decisions that will not contradict the USA both on the Iraq Mandatory in March 2003, and on the Adjara problem that emerged later.

This visit, which took place on February 17, 2004, is important as it is the first contact with the new administration in Georgia. The Turkish press also

<sup>35</sup> “Tek Adaylı Başkanlık Seçimi”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 4 January 2004, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Tolga Çıkrıkçı, The Adjarian Issue, *Conflict Areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Arda Özkan, Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu (eds.), Lanham: Lexington Books, London 2022, 144.

<sup>37</sup> “Gürcistan’da İç Savaş Söylentileri”, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2004/01/25/dun102.html>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>38</sup> “Rusya Gürcistan’ın Apo’sunu İade Etti”, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2004/01/23/dun114.html>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 11 February 2004, No: 25.

showed interest in this relationship. While Japaridze emphasized the continuation of stability in the South Caucasus, the main issue for Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül was the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline. Japaridze mentioned the possibility of establishing a second line on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route and stated that he would seek support from Türkiye<sup>40</sup>.

The event that started the Adjara Crisis took place on March 15, 2004. The fact that Georgian President Saakashvili was prevented from entering the Adjara region by the border guards of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara led to further strained relations<sup>41</sup>. Upon this development, Georgia deployed troops on the Adjara border and a statement came from the Russian front: *We have heard that they will invade Adjara, we tell them not to do such a thing*<sup>42</sup>. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, followed the event closely and in its statement *on the tension that has arisen between the Government of Georgia and the Administration of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara*, it stated that the problems can be resolved peacefully and that they are ready to provide all kinds of support to end the current tension<sup>43</sup>.

Aslan Abashidze said that he received the threat of *we will shoot down the plane you are on* from Georgia and asked for help from Türkiye by expressing that Türkiye became the guarantor state with the Treaty of Kars<sup>44</sup>. While these developments were taking place in Georgia, a shocking statement was made from Ankara. Foreign Minister Gül said *Georgia has problems not only with Adjara but also with other autonomous regions. (...) Georgia's territorial integrity should not be put at risk* and implicitly expressed that Türkiye is on the side of Georgia in the Georgia-Adjara issue<sup>45</sup>. Although it is important to defend the territorial integrity of Georgia, the lack of support for Adjara, where Türkiye is the guarantor, created surprise both in Adjara and in Türkiye. While the government made statements of support for Tbilisi; the fact that the opposition parties did not make any statements on the subject did not escape attention. Although the Adjara issue may seem insignificant in this period when the Cyprus and Iraq problems were experienced, Türkiye had an important advantage in the region as a guarantor state for nearly 80 years.

An important summit was held in Batumi on March 18, 2004. Tbilisi and Adjara administrations came together to solve the problem in Batumi. After the meeting, Saakashvili said, *We have reached a consensus with Abashidze on the solution to the problems; There is no problem or conflict between the Central*

<sup>40</sup> "Gürcistan'la Yeni Sayfa", (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 18 February 2004, 11.

<sup>41</sup> "Kafkasya'da Tehlike Çanları", (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 15 March 2004, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Sınırdaki Savaş Çanları, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2004/03/15/dun105.html>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 15 March 2004, No: 45.

<sup>44</sup> "Tiflis Uçagımı Düşürecek", <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/tiflis-ucagimi-dusurecek-209641>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>45</sup> "Gül'den Tiflis'e Destek", (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 16 March 2004, 10.

*Government and the Autonomous Region*<sup>46</sup>. In a statement the next day, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its great satisfaction that the solution was resolved by peaceful means<sup>47</sup>.

Although the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs implicitly gave a message of support to the Tbilisi Administration, Türkiye's Ambassador to Baku, Ünal Çeviköz, said that *Türkiye has the right to send soldiers to the Georgian Autonomous Republic of Adjara*. This statement by Ünal Çeviköz can be seen as the only statement among Turkish diplomats and bureaucrats that directly supports Adjara. This statement disturbed Russia and the Georgian Ambassador to Moscow, Konstantin Kemulariya, made a statement that „the Treaty of Kars has expired”<sup>48</sup>.

The news that there was a plan to assassinate the Georgian leader, Saakashvili, when it was thought that a full consensus was reached in the relations, changed the agenda. Georgian Minister of National Security, Gigi Ugulava, claimed that as a result of the investigation into the assassination plot, „The order of the assassination was given by the Adjara Minister of Internal Affairs, Cemal Gogitidze, and some senior officials”<sup>49</sup> Ugulava's statement has justified the Saakashvili administration, which sees the autonomy of Adjara as a problem and aims to make it dysfunctional, in front of the world public opinion, thus legitimizing any intervention to the region. The alleged assassination plot against Saakashvili can be explained by Henry Kissinger's words, „There is no easier way to raise the morale of a nation than to eliminate a non-existent threat”<sup>50</sup>. The Saakashvili administration must somehow equalize the Adjara administration, which it wanted to abolish but agreed in Batumi, and this way is through demonizing the Adjara administration and the people wanting this possible threat to be destroyed.

While the alleged assassination shook the agenda, another assassination news came to the fore. Russian Major General Alexander Studenikin, who was serving in Georgia, was injured in an explosion while he was trying to go to his home in Tbilisi and was hospitalized<sup>51</sup>.

On May 3, 2004, the process entered an irreversible path when the militias affiliated with Adjara blew up three bridges connecting Adjara to Georgia. In his statement, Saakashvili gave 10 days for the lifting of the state of emergency in Adjara and the disarmament of the militia, while a warning statement was made against any attack on Tbilisi from the Russian front<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> “Batumi’den Olumlu Hava”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 19 March 2004, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 19 March 2004, No: 47.

<sup>48</sup> “Rusya’yı Kızdıran Büyükelçi”, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/rusyayi-kizdiran-buyukelci-5109393>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>49</sup> “Gürcü Lidere Suikast Planı”, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2004/04/04/dun103.html>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>50</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomasi*, trans. İbrahim H. Kurt, İstanbul 2000, 162.

<sup>51</sup> Rus Komutana Suikast Girişimi, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 7 April 2004, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Acaristan’da Gergin Bekleyiş, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 4 May 2004, 11.

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, made two different statements on 4 May. In the first statement made, it was stated that Türkiye is determined to maintain its relations with Georgia in the form of friendship and good neighborliness, as it has been until today<sup>53</sup>. The second statement made on the same day, could not go beyond the commonsense statement as it was made during the Adjara issue<sup>54</sup>.

The next day, the President of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Aslan Abashidze, said that the ultimatum decision given by the Tbilisi administration would not be followed and that he would fight for their freedom if necessary. The tension in politics also spread to the people, and the police intervened with about 200 Batumi University students who gathered to protest against the Adjara Government<sup>55</sup>.

In an environment where the political tension was so high, the Tbilisi administration called on Abashidze to choose between execution or resignation and stated that it had connected Batumi to Tbilisi<sup>56</sup>. After Saakashvili declared that he would guarantee security for himself and his family if Abashidze resigned of his own free will and left the country, Aslan Abashidze resigned and left Adjara and went to Russia. This crisis between Georgia and Adjara was overcome when Abashidze left Adjara after he could not get the help he expected from Türkiye and Russia<sup>57</sup>. With the departure of Abashidze, large rallies were held under the leadership of Saakashvili<sup>58</sup>. With the resignation of Abashidze, Georgia gained a victory in domestic politics. It equaled one of the three autonomous regions, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Adjara; On 6 May, the Georgian Parliament dissolved the regional government in Adjara<sup>59</sup>.

Saakashvili, who came to visit Türkiye on May 20, 2004, met with President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and asked Turkish businessmen to invest in Georgia. With the commissioning of the Kars-Tbilisi Railway Project agreed between Türkiye and Georgia, Türkiye will open to Central Asia and Georgia will open to Europe<sup>60</sup>. He also stated that he was satisfied with Türkiye's stance on solving the Adjara problem at the conference held at the Eurasia Strategic Research Center<sup>61</sup>. This statement of Saakashvili is important: although the Turkish authorities made implicit statements of support for Georgia in the Adjara

<sup>53</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 4 May 2004, No: 75.

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 4 May 2004, No: 76.

<sup>55</sup> "Tiflis-Batumi Gerilimi Tırmanıyor", (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 5 May 2004, 11.

<sup>56</sup> "Gürcistan, Acar Liderin Kellesini İstedi", <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/gurcistan-acar-liderin-kellesini-istedi-334501>, Last Visit: March 30, 2023.

<sup>57</sup> "Abaşidze'ye Sürgün Teklifi", (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 6 May 2004, 11.

<sup>58</sup> "Güllerin Devrimi-2", <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2004/05/07/dun105.html>, (Accessed: 3/30/2023).

<sup>59</sup> Giray Saynur Bozkur, Gürcistan'daki Etnik Çatışmalar Karşısında Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Tutumu, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 19, No. 19, 2008, 20.

<sup>60</sup> "Saakashvili'den Acara'ya Yatırım Çağrısı", <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/saakasviliden-acaraya-yatirim-cagrisi-38605487>, (Accessed: 3/29/2023).

<sup>61</sup> "Ankara'dan Saakashvili'ye Destek", (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 21 May 2004, 11.

issue, the important thing is that they did not make statements in favor of Adjara. Saakashvili met with Foreign Minister Gül the next day and thanked him for the policies followed by Türkiye in the Adjara issue<sup>62</sup>.

After Aslan Abashidze resigned and left the country, there were important developments regarding the autonomous administration of Adjara. Saakashvili wanted to limit Adjara's autonomous powers and was largely successful with constitutional arrangements. Here are some of the things that changed under the 2004 Constitutional Law on the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, which dealt a blow to Adjara's autonomy<sup>63</sup>:

*I. Saakashvili abolished the authority of local governments to appoint administrators and took these powers for himself.*

*II. The President of Georgia shall have the power to suspend the Adjara Parliament and its laws.*

*III. The President of Georgia has the right to dissolve the Supreme Council of the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara if the Supreme Council of the Adjara Autonomous Republic (parliament) does not approve the candidate for the Head of Government of the Adjara Autonomous Republic twice in a row.*

As can be seen, it is clearly understood that these articles of law do not comply with the autonomous region structure. There was no reaction or response from Türkiye to these articles, which were adopted in July 2004. Looking at the statements published by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004, the statements regarding the Adjara problem ended in May 2004, and no statement was made regarding this issue either by the Foreign Ministry, the Prime Ministry, or the General Staff.

The fact that Turkey did not use its guarantor rights in the Adjara Autonomous Region caused the assimilation of the Muslim people there. The number of Muslims, which was 80% at the beginning of the 90s, dropped to 39% in 2014. In this case, other institutions have started working to ensure that Muslims protect their identities. Adjara Muslims, who preserved their cultural identity in the USSR for about 70 years, went to cities such as Istanbul and Konya to receive Islamic education after opening the Sarp border gate. In 2016, after the translation of the Qur'an into Georgian by „Hayrât Neşriyat”, training on the subject began to be given in the Qur'an schools that were opened. Although Georgian Muslims try to preserve their identity, they have difficulty understanding some terms because they are exposed to Christian traditions in their daily lives<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> “Ankara Gürcü Liderden Memnun”, (editorial), *Cumhuriyet*, 22 May 2004, 11.

<sup>63</sup> S. Dursun, *Bölgesel Devlet ve Özerklik*, 75-77.

<sup>64</sup> Ricardo R. Rivera, Translating Islam into Georgian, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, Vol. 28, No 2, 2019, 72-78.

## Summary

Adjara preserved its autonomy, which was gained during the USSR period, after the USSR's disintegration; after the USSR's collapse, the Georgian administration continued its existence within its borders. At the end of 2003, with the resignation of Georgian President Shevardnadze and the replacement of the pro-US Saakashvili, the two administrations came to a breaking point. After Tbilisi won the struggle between Tbilisi and Batumi, Abasidze, who ruled Adjara, left the country and about 2 months after this event, Georgia increased its pressure on Adjara.

According to the population data after the collapse of the USSR, approximately 80% of the population in the Adjara region consists of Muslim Georgians. Since the Saakashvili administration, an intense Christianization policy has been followed in the region, and the Muslim population and the Christian population in the region have come to an equal point. In addition, in line with the assimilation policy made in the Adjara region, the „Cross“ sign was placed on the flag of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

According to the population data given by the Adjara Statistics Unit in 2014, 60% of the population was recorded as Orthodox Georgians and 39% as Muslim Georgians. The fact that the Muslim population in the Adjara region has fallen by half in a short period of about 20 years and the Orthodox population has increased to such an interesting extent reveals the conclusion that Georgia has implemented a serious assimilation policy towards Muslims in the Adjara region. Türkiye did not use the powers given to it by the Moscow and Kars Treaty in the face of the events just beyond the border and evaluated the issue as an internal problem of Georgia. In this state, the Muslim people of Adjara, with whom we have historical ties on our border, were left to their own fate.

## Zaključak

Adžara je zadržala svoju autonomiju, koju je stekla tokom perioda SSSR-a, nakon raspada SSSR-a; gruzijska administracija nastavila je da postoji unutar njenih granica. Krajem 2003. godine, nakon ostavke gruzijskog predsjednika Ševardnadzea i dolaska pro-američkog Sakašvilija, došlo je do prekida između ove dvije administracije. Nakon što je Tbilisi pobijedio u sukobu s Batumijem, Abasidze, koji je vladao Adžarom, napustio je zemlju, a otprilike dva mjeseca nakon ovog događaja, Gruzija je pojačala pritisak na Adžaru.

Prema podacima o stanovništvu nakon raspada SSSR-a, otprilike 80% stanovništva u regiji Adžara čine muslimanski Georgijci. Od dolaska Sakašvilija na vlast, u regiji se provodila intenzivna politika kršćanizacije, a muslimansko i kršćansko stanovništvo došlo je do tačke jednakosti. Također, u skladu s politikom asimilacije u regiji Adžara, simbol „Križa“ postavljen je na zastavu Autonomne Republike Adžara.

Prema podacima o stanovništvu koje je dala Statistička jedinica Adžare 2014. godine, 60% stanovništva je registrovano kao pravoslavni Gruzijci, dok je 39% bilo muslimanski Gruzijci. Činjenica da je muslimansko stanovništvo u regiji Adžara palo za polovinu u razdoblju od otprilike 20 godina, dok je pravoslavno stanovništvo značajno poraslo, ukazuje na to da je Gruzija sprovela ozbiljnu politiku asimilacije prema muslimanima u regiji Adžara. Turska nije iskoristila ovlaštenja koja su joj data Moskovskim i Karskim ugovorom suočena s događajima neposredno preko granice, već je ovo pitanje ocijenila kao unutrašnji problem Gruzije. U tom stanju, muslimani u Adžari, s kojima imamo historijske veze na našoj granici, ostavljeni su na milost i nemilost.

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