

## Two Faces of Nationalism and Efforts to Establish Georgian Identity

From the 90's to present day Georgian society witnessed numerous nationalist demonstrations led by individuals inspired by different national ideas. There is a popular belief that Zviad Gamsakhurdia was leaning towards ethnic nationalism (*jus sanguinis*), which largely determined his actions, while our present president Mikheil Saakashvili introduced state nationalism (*jus soli*).

In the following article, I will try to determine the authenticity of these presumptions relying on documentary material and the work of an American sociologist Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*<sup>1</sup>. I will compare public statements and ideas of these two politicians, will discuss similarities and differences between them and will attempt to theoretically determine their political inclinations.

Brubaker starts *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* by emphasizing differences between German and French definitions of citizenship in the context of broad public discussion of judicial, political and ethnic issues. He talks about the principles of German *jus sanguinis* (citizenship determined by ethnicity) and French *jus soli* (citizenship determined by place of birth).

Brubaker describes dominant ideals of elitist nationalist self-reflection and history of traditions in France and Germany—the nation-states where these traditions and ideals developed in completely different directions despite numerous similarities. Brubaker's unique approach towards political sociology lies in his emphasis on the often overlooked institution of citizenship. Formal citizenship is invaluable because it determines membership in a nation-state—who is given rights, privileges, job responsibilities and who is required to be loyal as a citizen. Conversely, it also categorizes outsiders who cannot take advantage of the benefits of citizenship.

Brubaker argues that dissimilar civil involvement of immigrants in France and Germany is an outcome of disparate processes of nation-building. He also suggests that French citizenship ideals and norms originated during the French Revolution when the nation was not yet formed as an ethno-culturally and linguistically consistent entity. "Unlike France, nationhood in Germany is a strictly ethno-cultural concept superior and detached from the state"<sup>2</sup>. The German nation's search for a country ended with the emergence of a German 'nation-state'. 19th century Germany was a constellation of dispersed, but ethno-culturally related states. Its nationality and cultural

belonging was greatly affected by wars in disunited Europe. Brubaker believes that partition of Germany and creation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany had a decisive impact on German national belonging. The author emphasizes that German Federal Republic remained loyal to joint citizenship despite the territorial division, attesting to western Germany's denunciation of the separation.

Unlike the fragmentation experienced during the formation of German nation-state, France was expanding from center to periphery through assimilation. The ideals of the French Revolution and Republican civil ideology were located at the center, with special emphasis on shared political rights and civil equality. Brubaker claims that two main instruments were employed in the assimilation of peripheral territories—compulsory public education and military service. Fast development of the French nation-state and successful inculcation of cultural and national ideals in foreigners and peasants turned France into an “assimilationist” country. In contrast to Germany where national belonging is perceived in biological terms, a child born in France from foreign parents automatically becomes a French citizen, but only under the condition that they settle down in France.

When comparing these two seemingly similar nation-states—France and Germany, dissimilar development of traditions and ideals is decisive. Brubaker's work illustrates the emergence of a more biased, exclusive, ethno-culturally concentrated concept of a nation in Germany and a more expansive, universalist, assimilationist political identity in France. We have two forms of civil-belonging at hand: *jus soli* (citizenship determined by place of birth) and *jus sanguinis* (citizenship determined by ethnicity).

These two forms of nationalism will be discussed in Georgian political context. I will compare nationalist inclinations of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Mikheil Saakashvili in order to determine which type of civil belonging they prefer, if such preference is even defined.

### *Nationalism in the 90's Georgia*

*“The Presidential Election Law was issued by the Supreme Council of Georgia after the first hearing. According to the Law, first Presidential General Elections will be held on May 26, 1991 by a secret ballot on the basis of universal human suffrage”<sup>3</sup>.*

Absolute majority of Georgian population voted for Zviad Gamsakhurdia. On May 27, 1991 Zviad Gamsakhurdia answered a question posed by a Portuguese journalist regarding public unity: “common consent has already

been reached. As you can see, 99% of Georgians and 65% of non-Georgians voted for me. Thus, there are no sides, conflicts and everything else is a gossip [...]”<sup>4</sup>.

When analyzing Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s public statements one can notice the predominance of nationalist rhetoric. Gamsakhurdia used to deny this tendency, arguing that he was a patriot. However, as Gellner and Anderson suggest these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. “- During our conversation not even once have you uttered the word ‘national’... Are you a nationalist? — No, I am a patriot”<sup>5</sup>.

Similar to France, Georgian national-independence movement was a process of expansion from the center to periphery. However, unlike France where political rights and civil equality were prioritized, Zviad Gamsakhurdia sought to unite the nation around ethno-religious concepts, which excluded permanent inhabitants of Georgia who did not identify with Christian faith. Gamsakhurdia’s nationalism closely linked Georgian ethnicity with Christianity and consequently, his speeches were imbued with religious themes—“Christ-like sacrifice” of Georgian nation<sup>6</sup>, “inevitable revival”<sup>7</sup>, “protection of the Holy Virgin”<sup>8</sup> and many other<sup>9</sup>.

Gamsakhurdia’s speech from May 26, 1990 serves as a good example: *“and today, my dear friends, we need to tell the truth since we were sent by God for truth, Georgian people were made for justice, to have faith in the truth, to have faith in Christ... Brothers and sisters! Georgian nation, God’s nation”*<sup>10</sup>.

The next statement practically issues an ultimatum for an individual’s membership in Georgian nation:

*“Georgian nation, you have two paths in front of you. Your national-independence movement is at a crossroads. There is a path of Ilia Martali, path of holiness, morality, democracy, truth, and innocence, and there is a path of robbery, insidiousness, and terrorism! Georgian nation and Georgians, choose, choose the path of Christ and kindness, choose the path of Ilia Martali because it will lead you to purgatory! And whoever picks the path of destruction, the path of Barabbas, will be cursed for eternity”*<sup>11</sup>.

The president convincingly tried to equate Georgian nation, as a historical ethnicity with Christianity: *“Christianity saved and preserved our ethnicity, language, and nationhood”*<sup>12</sup>. It could be argued that similar speeches suggest the impossibility of national consolidation due to Georgia’s ethno-religious diversity. With this type of rhetoric Gamsakhurdia delineated Georgian identity, excluding a large number of citizens. The process is very similar to Brubaker’s *jus sanguinis* model of nationalism<sup>13</sup>.

Besides from identification of Georgian nation with Christianity, Gamsakhurdia expresses his loyalty towards non-Georgian and non-Chris-

tian citizens. This trait somewhat detaches him from *jus sanguinis* model and on the contrary, makes him an advocate of state nationalism — determining citizenship through place of birth, *jus soli*.

In an interview, Gamsakhurdia states:

*“Our goal is to consolidate Georgian population, both Georgians and non-Georgians. Their rights have not been and will not be violated in the future. [...] Our enemies spread rumors that we want to deport them. That is a gossip, a lie, and Georgians know that. There is no confrontation from the population if Kremlin does not get involved with its agencies”<sup>14</sup>.*

Zviad Gamsakhurdia often expressed certainty that rumors about state restriction of other ethnicities were spread both inside and outside of Georgia. The goal of these rumors was to thwart Georgian independence. One such statement was voiced in an interview with *Ogoniok*:

*“Certain mass media outlets define the ongoing processes in Georgia in a peculiar manner. I want to note once again that our attitude towards non-Georgian population was always friendly. We do not plan to deviate from this principle. The Law on Ethnic Minorities, which will soon be issued by the government, will be a good testimony to our disposition. Rumors spread by our enemies about the oppression of ethnic minorities are a crude attempt to create negative public opinion regarding the ongoing political processes, the Supreme Council, and to thwart the development of independence”<sup>15</sup>.*

The president also noted that “every permanent resident of the Republic will be a citizen of Georgia”. This statement is a little vague and hard to comprehend since the term “permanent resident”, as well as the period one has to spend in the country to become a citizen, need to be clearly defined. However, the president’s determination not to discriminate other ethnicities is obvious.

The different national models proposed by Brubaker, *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*, are equally expressed during the 90’s, and namely during Gamsakhurdia’s leadership. It is hard to ascribe one national-political model to the first president, especially because of the brevity of his rule.

### *Nationalism after the Rose Revolution*

The 90’s was a harsh period in Georgian history: civil wars, loss of Abkhazia, social and economic crises and soaring criminality. Eduard Shevardnadze’s leadership ended with the Rose Revolution (2003) and his resignation on November 23. The National Movement led by Mikheil Saakashvili took over the government. On January 4, 2004 Georgian population elected Mikheil Saakashvili as the president with more than 96% of votes.

During 2004 Inaugural Swearing-in Ceremony Saakashvili's national rhetoric closely resembled Gamsakhurdia's pathos. He emphasized the location where the speech was uttered and national magnitude of those individuals who perished on April 9, 1989. However, unlike Gamsakhurdia, Saakashvili was less religion-oriented and stressed unification and equality of multi-ethnic Georgian society:

*“Georgia needs to become a model of democracy where every citizen will be equal under the Law, where every citizen will have equal opportunities for success and self-realization. Georgia needs to and will turn into the homeland for independent, educated and proud individuals. Georgia is home to every Georgian and every non-Georgian living in the country. Every citizen of Georgia—whether Russian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Jew, Greek, Ukrainian or Kurd, who considers Georgia his/her homeland is the biggest treasure and wealth of this country”<sup>16</sup>.*

For Saakashvili, establishment of a strong state requires not only citizens with equal rights, but also a strong army, vigorous military spirit and other traits of nationalist ideology. He relies on historical examples as an integral part of nationalism to bolster ethnic-national consciousness by linking identity with Golden Ages.

*“We need to resuscitate the Georgian military spirit that saved us for centuries. We need to revive the traditions of David the Builder, Giorgi Brckinvale, our heroes—300 Aragvians and many others, traditions of Didgori heroes. Otherwise Georgia will not be able to stand up on its feet as a state. Military forces require not only presidential and governmental care and attention, but also dedication of every Georgian family. It is an honor for every Georgian family to help our armed forces and to create a strong Georgian army”<sup>17</sup>.*

On a parade in honor of independence on May 26, 2005 Mikheil Saakashvili clearly stressed *jus soli* principles: *“Georgia is a proud nation. A nation that consists of different ethnicities: Georgians and citizens of our country with Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azerbaijani origins. But they are all citizens of our homeland, they are all patriots”<sup>18</sup>.*

His other texts are also imbued with the same pathos—with a clear determination to establish Georgian citizenship through place of birth<sup>19</sup>:

*“When discussing different nationalities I meant multi-ethnicity because there is only one Georgian nation and it consists of Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians and Armenians.*

*I want to welcome our population in Tskhinvali, Java, Znauri, Akhlagori, Small and Large Liakhvi valleys, and many other places. I want to tell them that Ossetians were and remain part of Georgia's heroic past because that is one of the main goals of Georgian state.*

*I want to tell them in the name of Georgia and myself—we love and respect them*<sup>20</sup>.

In parallel to these texts, Saakashvili's references to the so-called "Georgian gene" are also worth noting since they represent attempts at stigmatization and are in conflict with the idea of civil equality. "*Georgian multi-century gene carries a completely different worldview. We survived Basiani, Shamkori, and Didgori owing to this gene*"<sup>21</sup>. The same attitude is revealed in Saakashvili's following speech: "*Georgians are everywhere. Looking at that, how could I not say with pride: all the good ones are Georgians!*"<sup>22</sup>

We come across the same challenge when analyzing Mikheil Saakashvili's speeches—it is hard to choose from the two types of nationalism, *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*. It is obvious that picking the *jus soli* model exclusively is problematic (considering statements about ethnic and historical uniqueness of Georgians). Differences in regard to religious references are also worth noting—unlike Gamsakhurdia, Saakashvili practically omits religious themes from his speeches.

## *Conclusion*

In this article I tried to show nationalist inclinations of past and present presidents of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Mikheil Saakashvili. Popular belief that Zviad Gamsakhurdia was oriented towards ethnic nationalism (*jus sanguinis*), while Mikheil Saakashvili favored state nationalism (*jus soli*) was proved problematic. During their public appearances both presidents exhibited values characteristic to both forms of nationalism.

During the research it was proposed that through his attempts to equate Georgian ethnicity with Christianity and emphasis on Georgian uniqueness, Gamsakhurdia could be considered in favor of citizenship by descent. However, other texts clearly suggest multi-ethnic equality. The situation is analogous in Mikheil Saakashvili's case with the difference that statements advocating territorial nationalism are more abundant and obvious in his speeches (this distinction, however, might derive from Gamsakhurdia's brief leadership compared to Saakashvili's term in office). At the same time, like Gamsakhurdia, Saakashvili also stressed Georgian descent and historical uniqueness of Georgians, which obviously obstructs civil equality among different ethnicities. Finally, it must be noted that from today's perspective discourse and criticism of civil society is, generally speaking, exaggerated since Georgian statehood and civil ideas are in the process of development.

## Notes:

1. Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, (Harvard University Press, 1992), 52
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Sakartvelos Respublika* N73 (93), April 16, 1991, 1.
4. *Sakartvelos Respublika* N108 (128), May 30, 1991, 1.
5. *Sakartvelos Respublika* N36 (56), February 22, 1991, 1.
6. *Sakartvelos Respublika* N15 (35), November 14, 1991, 1.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Tevzadze, Gigi. „Secularization and the Birth of a Nation“. *Identity Studies*, Ilia State University, Vol 2, 2010, p.11.
10. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Speech of May 26, 1990 (full text), July 2, 2010. <http://zviadgamsakhurdia.wordpress.com/tag/%E1%83%98%E1%83%9D%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%94/> (Accessed 06.06.2013)
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Easter*, N12 (44), April 9, 1993. 1.
13. Zedania, Giga. “The Rise of Religious Nationalism in Georgia”. *Identity Studies*, Ilia State University, Vol. 3, 2011, p. 121.
14. *Sakartvelos Respublika* N38 (58), February 26, 1991, 1-2.
15. *Sakartvelos Respublika* N39 (59), February 27, 1991, 1-2.
16. Mikheil Saakashvili's Speech at the Swearing-In Ceremony <http://president.gov.ge/ge/President/Inauguration> (Accessed 06.06.2013)
17. *Ibid.*
18. Mikheil Saakashvili's Public Appearance on Georgian Independence Day Parade, May 26, 2004. <http://president.gov.ge/ge/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2760&ci=1> (Accessed 06.06.2013)
19. Zedania, Giga. “The Rise of Religious Nationalism in Georgia”. *Identity Studies*, Ilia State University, Vol. 3, 2011, p. 121.
20. Mikheil Saakashvili's Public Appearance on Georgian Independence Day Parade, May 26, 2004. <http://president.gov.ge/ge/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2760&ci=1> (Accessed 06.06.2013).
21. *Ibid.*
22. “Georgian President: We are Georgians and wherever we might be, in whatever circumstances, we need to remain Georgians”, April 7, 2013. <http://president.gov.ge/ge/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=8215&ci=1> (Accessed 06.06.13)