

Formation of a State and a Nation in Modern Georgia: an Unfinished Project?

Introduction

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, several simultaneous though contradictory processes can be observed in the international politics, namely, those of integration and fragmentation which are often referred to as “globalization” and “ethnicization”¹. On the one hand, international markets are being formed, the globalization of communication means is under way and political, economic and cultural interdependence is being enhanced. On the other hand, various transitions - a simultaneous transformation of political, economic and other social systems, entailing the rise of local self-consciousness - take place in separate political systems. These processes, observed even in the so-called developed west European countries, are especially clear-cut in the former socialist and Soviet countries. The significance of each of these countries is intensified by the fact that the transformation of a political system and the development of an economic system take place along with the process of the formation of key prerequisites - the state and the political nation. It is precisely the process of determining as to what geographic area will acquire political and economic dimensions and who will construct these systems that is actually taking place in these countries.

Georgia is the most blatant example of these transformations in this regard: with the integration into international structures going on actively, the questions key to the building of a state and a nation - *where, in what geographic area the Georgian statehood is being built and who comprise the Georgian nation* - remain unanswered since 1990-es.

Raising this question in such a way is based on several assumptions: 1. a nation is a political entity which can be fully constructed only within the context of a state; 2. consequently, until before the formation of the Georgian state is not completed, the Georgian nation will not be born. It is precisely this process that takes place now.

The aim of the given analysis is to identify main challenges to the formation of the Georgian political nation. The key challenge is to achieve the homogeneity of Georgian people (community of people living on the territory of Georgia) in terms of, at least, political culture, i.e. subjective attitude towards political aims and means. Following the abovementioned logic, this

aim can be achieved only if the project of state formation is successfully implemented. The key challenge to this project, however, is ethnic conflicts. The outcome of the process of formation of the Georgian political nation is therefore directly linked to the result of the conflict settlement.

The above reasoning is based on the synthesis of a number of theoretical approaches in the sphere of the formation of a state and nation (nationalism). In general, it is a constructivist and modernist understanding of a nation, namely, its linking to the process of political, economic and social modernization². This process is inseparable from the formation of a state as an institute of power, which, on its part, is an unintended result of the process of the accumulation of power and its economic foundation³. This approach does not ignore the significance of an ethnic factor as it is obvious that states would be formed and nations born more “easily” in places where cultural (in a wider sense) prerequisites in the form of common language, religion and traditions already existed. “Unintendedness” means an accidental and unplanned nature of the process where each factor is important. Methodologically, however, it is important to show the effect of the concentration of power and resources on the formalization of power instruments, which resulted in the creation of a modern state and a parallel formation of a homogenous society - a political nation.

In the following sections of the paper we will briefly describe the process of the formation of a state and nation in Europe, local effects of this process in separate provinces of empires, and modern challenges faced by Georgia. We will see that a western model can be applied in Georgia so that a threat of being blamed in Euro-centrism can be avoided. The key argument here is that the process of modernization, despite its different results, went on similarly in eastern and western Europe and Georgia belongs in this area. Gellner identifies four zones of the spread of nationalism in Europe where this processes developed in different times: Western Europe (dynastic kingdoms along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean), Central Europe (the former Holy Roman Empire), central and eastern Europe (Austrian and Ottoman Empires), and Eastern Europe (Ottoman and Russian Empires). In the fourth zone the process of transition from non-nationalistic to nationalistic order continued throughout the 20th century and has not completed yet even in the 21st century⁴.

The formation of a state and a nation in Europe: from the concentration of power to an agency of the power monopoly

Nations are social constructs and they are primarily the result of the 19th century (political) modernization. Nations and a nation-state, as a modern form of the state, which replaced a territorial state, is an unintended (unplanned) by-product of the transformation of the political governance. It was realized in parallel to the transformation of a territorial state, under the conditions of a technological and social modernization. Gellner discusses general modernization whereas Hobsbawm, in a narrower sense, attributes a special importance to issues of political governance⁵. Moreover, Hobsbawm's structuralist explanation that the key aim of a nationalistic ideology was to maintain a ruling class' control over subordinates in the conditions of social changes is an exaggeration. It is true that traditional social ties sever during industrial revolutions - where a society was of a nuclear nature before, the industrial revolution caused migration, a traditional entity no longer exists and it should be replaced by a "national entity". Under such circumstances, the ideology of nationalism, with its "invented stories", assumes the function of the control over society and the legitimization of the existing political authority. Of course, logic of power can be seen behind the ideology of nationalism but not in a narrow class-specific sense. Quite the opposite, the nationalism, from the beginning, was closely associated with liberalism which, in structuralist understanding, was the ideology of a new class of bourgeoisie. The merger of nationalism and conservatism (i.e. the development of nationalism into an ideological tool) happened later, in the second half of the 19th century, when nation-states were finally formed in Europe⁶.

Viewing nationalism as an "ideological project" alone conflicts with the assumption that a process of nationalism is unintended and a state and nation are by-products of a political modernization. When talking about unplanned nature, it is assumed that initial goals of the political transformation were, as it basically happens in history, different ones than the formation of a nation and a nation-state. To be more precise they, in contrast to a rather general and ambiguous goal of nationalism, were quite concrete and familiar for that time. In feudal era, political entities (be they empires, city-states or princedoms) tried to be prepared for the fulfillment of the main function of a feudal state - to wage war. Any political entity in medieval Europe had to be prepared (in terms of defense) or was prepared (in terms of attack) to wage war. It was not only their legitimate right but also a duty as the vassal system was concentrated on ensuring security and in that it differed from a natural condition.

Waging war required resources. There existed two options to obtain resources: 1. hiring an army with finances, and 2. collecting army through feudal tax (feudal vassals collected an army for their patrons). The first option was primarily opted for by trade cities (comp., Italy with its entire caste of professional warriors) whilst the second one by feudal territorial monarchies. However, the latter also borrowed money to enhance their forces with hired regiments. Meanwhile, as the number and density of population increased so did the frequency and scale of wars. At the same time the importance of not only war but also preparations for war as well as post-war stages grew more apparent. Those who undertook preparations for war in due time were gaining a strategic advantage. As regards post-war stages, this issue is more interesting: no essential changes were made to governing systems of occupied territories in previous times; for example, where patrons of castles timely made truce with aggressors, they continued to govern and their subordinates would not have to be concerned about who was their sovereign's sovereign - a Spanish king or a French one.⁷

The higher the frequency of wars, the larger was the interest of political forces toward resources. This has also conditioned the formation of a regular army and the creation of professional military, which eventually formalized only under a nation-state. An increased demand for resources gradually forced a political center to shift from an indirect leveled governance style toward a direct one.⁸ A political center starts building up a rudimentary bureaucracy which first establishes control over taxation, then interferes in the redistribution of capital and finally, in the production process and thus, the communication is established (road, mail, telegraph). The state interferes in local spheres of a society and an individual, which have been regulated earlier by traditions.

What is the key outcome of the establishment of the direct governance? Attempts toward the concentration of power create a state monopoly on violence which no longer puts up with a diversified, feudal model of political governance with different types of "governance" at various local levels. The homogenization of the political governance facilitates the homogenization of a society. A common bureaucracy can hardly be imagined without literacy and knowledge of a common language. The state, therefore, starts thinking about an elementary education system. The education system (military educational institutions at an initial stage) facilitates social mobility and the first possibilities and the motivation for the mobility between social strata emerge.

This time, the state deliberately supports this process - exaggerates historical realities or creates historical myths; creates new symbols - a national flag, national anthem, national architecture; enhances the belief in homoge-

neity of the society - to breed patriots becomes the key goal of the education system. The nationalism now really becomes ideology in the hands of the elite, which facilitates the expansion of own identity among masses.

The fact that it was not an easy process can be seen by the example of the French revolution. In 1793-1794, the revolutionary terror took the lives of tens of thousands of people for the only reason that Jacobins were keen to implement these inevitable changes at a very high pace. Peasants of Vandée as well as of other provinces were against such an engineering of the state. Supposedly, they were supported by local elites as this challenge was of an existential nature for the latter. Although, ultimately, Jacobins fell victims to their own guillotine, France, as a result, outpaced every European country in the formation of a nation-state and nation. It should be said that until the end of the 19th century masses showed no interest towards nationalism. Despite a political unification of Italy and Germany, the German and Italian nationalism reached a mass scale only through active efforts undertaken by the political authority. A cultural nationalism was characteristic for elites whilst masses maintained their allegiance to regional identities⁹.

The formation of states in Europe and local effects

The formation of nation-states put an end to political entities existing earlier. City-states and princedoms became integrated into nation-states whereas empires fell apart. However, this project also was not pre-planned, which makes the mistakenness of a primordial approach obvious. How could otherwise be explained the survival of such mini-states as Andorra, San-Marino, Monaco, Lichtenstein or the success of such a multiethnic state as Switzerland? Why Bavaria failed to “survive” whilst Austria, on the contrary, was not included in a unified Germany? These examples illustrate that the formation of a nation-state and, accordingly, a political nation, was first and foremost conditioned by political processes rather than cultural roots.

Cultural prerequisites became more significant in those regions (mainly, empires) where the center failed to successfully implement a process of political modernization. In such cases local entities (at the level of elites and not masses!) mastered modernization mechanisms obtained from the state but used them to enhance their own identities. The defeat of empires in pan-European wars contributed to them as well - the defeat and the weakening of the Spanish Empire was followed by the formation of Latin American countries; the downfall of Austrian and Ottoman empires and their defeat in the World War I was followed by the formation of eastern Europe. A partial

breakup of the Russian Empire resulted in the formation of even such nations which lacked a strong ethnic foundation – Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania could be quoted as examples. It seems useless, from the practical point of view, to ask whether the Georgian nationalism could be the creator of a Georgian political nation if in 1917, the revolution was not followed by a Bolshevik coup and Russia did not disintegrate even temporarily.

Territorial states in western Europe managed to form modern states and construct political nations within more or less “traditional” boundaries whereas the modernization carried out by empires in east Europe according to the same logic helped create a new political map. The process, which started late 19th century with the disintegration of the Austrian, Ottoman and Russian empires, continued with the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of the 20th century and has not ended yet in this area.

The building of state and the construction of nation in modern Georgia

After the Bolshevik takeover in October, 1917, leaders of the Caucasus waited for the situation to be cleared up in the centre for several months and it was only in April 1918, and due to pressure from external forces, that they declared their independence. The same happened in case of the democratic republic of Georgia, although the national consciousness in Georgia started to develop in the second half of the 19th century¹⁰. Similarly to other empires (see, above), the Georgian nationalism mastered those mechanisms of modernization which, normally, should have served the goal of creating a homogenous population of the empire. The most visible, in this regard, was the establishment of The Society for the Spread of Literacy among Georgians.

Three incomplete years of independence proved to be insufficient for the formation of the Georgian political elite.¹¹ The situation was aggravated by repressions of 1920-es and 1930-es, when an entire stratum of the carriers of a Georgian nationalistic idea was actually demolished. A new wave of nationalism in Georgia started in the Soviet era with Soviet intelligentsia and nomenclature being its carriers. The development logic should have also been similar to that of the second half of the 19th century with the difference that this time better mechanisms for the spread of nationalistic ideas existed in the form of schools and mass media. From 1960-es, the Soviet Union first entered the stagnation and then the disintegration phases. Consequently, the mechanisms for the formation of homogenous Soviet nation – bureaucracy, education system –acquired local consumers. Since 1960-es, local nomencla-

ture and intelligentsia became increasingly “national” which translated into boundaries of the republic becoming acceptable limits for their career development. The same logic is revealed in monuments, prose, poetry and more importantly, school textbooks dedicated to patriotic themes. The fact that in the republics of the southern Caucasus the textbooks on the national history offered schoolchildren radically different views is probably a topic of a separate research.

Since the second half of the 1980-es, when the central authority of the Soviet Union started to erode and the propaganda of nationalistic ideas broke out of control, these ideas found a larger mass support as compared to the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, irredentism especially transpired in those regions where formal germs of political institutes had already been observed; these were, apart from Soviet republics, ethnic autonomies¹². This probably also proves the assumption that nationalism becomes a mass one only in the conditions of a political entity.

Two attempts of the formation of a Georgian nation have been distinguished since 1990-es to date¹³. The first, the Gamsakhurdia period, when a political construction of a Georgian nation started with ethnocentric nationalism and was followed by the enactment of at least two counter-projects in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, was a failure. At the same time, however, the transformation of various social systems (education, territorial administration, communication), though still in a nascent phase, proved to be strong enough to make the issue of national statehood irreversible for the Georgian society. The second, the Saakashvili period, when the political (civic) nationalism has come to the fore in the political construction of the Georgian nation and the state started intervention into a social space in a more prepared manner, has not ended yet.

It is interesting that the logic and the rhetoric of the state and nation building in Georgia replicate the European experience. In addition to state symbols, the state’s attempt to reform education system, improve efficiency of central and territorial structures in terms of tax reform, are obvious. The efforts of the state to mobilize resources and to channel a large portion of it toward military capacities are especially noteworthy.¹⁴ At present, Georgia is on the stage of a state-led nationalism. However, relying on the assumption that the projects of state and nation formation are undefined, on the one hand, and considering a fact of two unsettled conflicts, on the other, it seems premature to talk about final contours of the Georgian state and Georgian nation.

Conclusion

The formation of a nation-state and a nation in the European region turned out to be an outcome of a historical accident. The states emerged within separate territorial political entities through the concentration of power which, in its turn, was conditioned by frequent wars. The mobilization of resources needed to prepare for wars, wage wars and manage post-war stages preconditioned the formation of a civil bureaucracy and a military vertical. As economic and social modernization processes went on in parallel, the participation in these processes was increasing. At a certain stage, the established states deliberately facilitated the homogenization of own population through the introduction of an education system, direct governance structures. Where this project was implemented successfully, local identities were replaced by national ones but where the intervention of the center was unsystematic and weak and local differences huge, a local elite used intervention mechanisms for the implementation of its own project. This process was not painless on any of the occasions; it was accompanied by bloodsheds labeled as counter-revolutions or liberation movements by the history. The second way of the development was more characteristic for the empires in eastern Europe. In the beginning of the 20th century new nation-states and nations emerged on the basis of Austrian, Ottoman and partially, Russian empires, some of which developed their national consciousness only thereafter. The Russian Empire continued with its existence in a somewhat changed form until the end of the 20th century and produced a new wave of nationalism by its disintegration. The formation of a nation-state and nation in Georgia was associated with ethnic conflicts. A project of ethnic nationalism developed in the Soviet Georgia has not extended over at least two regions, those of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These two regions also remain isolated from a current project of a rather political nationalism. The outcome of the project largely depends on the duration of the maintenance of the status quo and on the mode of a final result.

Notes:

- 1 Ulrich Menzel, *Globalisierung vs. Fragmentierung*, Frankfurt am Main 1998.
- 2 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Nations and Nationalism Since 1870: Program, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge

- 1983.; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983.
- 3 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990-1992*, Malden, MA 1992.
 - 4 Zurab Davitashvili, *Nationalism and Globalization*, bilisi 2003, pp. 120-121 (in Georgian).
 - 5 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Nations and Nationalism Since 1870*.
 - 6 John Meriman, *A History of Modern Europe: From the French Revolution to the Present*, vol. 2, New York-London 2004, p. 707-745.
 - 7 Cf. Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990-1992*, p. 67-95;
 - 8 Ibid, p.103-107;
 - 9 John Meriman, *A History of Modern Europe: From the French Revolution to the Present*, vol. 2, p. 707-745.
 - 10 About Georgian nationalism in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, see R. G. Sunny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1994, p. 113-208.
 - 11 In case of Baltic States, a 20-year period of independence appeared enough for strong national identities to be born.
 - 12 It is interesting that officials and intelligentsia of ethnic autonomies consider the territory of ethnic autonomies as such “boundaries”. About autonomy as a contributor to irredentist nationalism, see Svante E. Cornell, «Autonomy as a Source of Conflict», in: *World Politics* 54, January 2002, p. 245-276.
 - 13 The Shevardnadze period is ignored as he was not active in terms of the construction of a nation, avoided the direct state governance and opted for leveled political governance. A clear example of it is the regime of Aslan Abashidze as well as tolerance towards other regional clientele networks.
 - 14 Cf. the increase in defense budget from GEL 50 million in 2002 to GEL 1 billion in 2007.