

**ATTEMPTS TO BUILD DEMOCRATIC NATION-
STATE IN AN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE COUNTRY:
THE CASE OF GEORGIA**

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of my thesis is to extend the theory of “the Fourth Wave of transition in the Post-communist world” endorsed by Michael McFaul (2004), and to find out to what extent and why Georgia, unlike Central and Eastern European countries, during its transition from communism and after ended up with an unconsolidated regime burdened with interethnic conflicts and semi-dictatorial rules. Thus, in order to answer my research question, I embarked on an analysis of Georgia’s political landscape since the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly the attempts, challenges and factors that Georgia faced during the presidential rule of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili. In order to accomplish my analysis, I applied a case study on Georgia’s state-building processes and conflict resolution. Based on my findings, the theory indeed explains the reasons why Georgia’s transition ended up with an unconsolidated state and hybrid or semi-autocratic rules: the presence of territorial disputes, its geographical location and the Soviet legacy of ethno-federalism.

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INTRODUCTION

After declaring its independence in 1991, Georgia, the tiny country in Transcaucasia, started to build an independent nation-state. However, the way toward peaceful, prosperous and democratic Georgia, to which the country aspired and aspires today, turned out to be extremely painful, since the threats that Georgia encountered on its way proved to be detrimental for the implementation of the project. Among the threats faced by Georgia, most catastrophic were emerging ethnic wars, civil war and regime changes which significantly affected the country's capabilities to consolidate statehood and democracy. Besides, the changing world order especially after demise of the Soviet Union followed by September 11, the eastward expansion of the European Union and the resurgent Russia, trying to reassert its interest on the global political arena, significantly affected the dynamics of the events taking place in the countries of South Caucasus, and particularly Georgia. The growing geopolitical interest of global world powers towards the region, due to Georgia's meaningful geo-strategic location turned the area almost into a battlefield of conflicting interests. The recent incident which put Georgia in the focus of the international community's attention was the five day August War between Georgia and Russia in 2008, which transformed an interethnic war into the inter-state one, bringing a lot of destruction, human suffering and recognition of the breakaway regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru.

The master thesis will outline and examine the domestic and external effects that had an influence on Georgia's transition and regime changes since its independence with respect to state and nation building, democratization and territorial unity. Particularly, I want to find out first what factors had influenced the state collapse of Gamsakhurdia's rule, the first president of the independent Georgia, who only managed to hold the office for less than one year in

1991 and who soon was ousted by military coup, plus whose rule was marked by rising nationalism, confrontational center-periphery relations precipitating conflicts and highly fragmented political climate, second what were the underlying implications of the state's failure under Shevardnadze's rule to consolidate Georgia's fragmented statehood and pave the way to Georgia's transformation to democratic, free market oriented country, and finally why the attempts by Saakashvili, who came to the power after the nonviolent coup in 2003, known as the Rose Revolution, did not result in successful consolidation of Georgia's statehood and democracy.

Therefore based on the theory of "the Fourth Wave Transition in the Post-communist world" elaborated by Michael McFaul in his article "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Non-cooperative Transitions in the Post-communist World" (2004), which attempts to distinguish transitional outcomes with respect to regime and state consolidation of former-Soviet republics from the outcomes of the Central and Eastern European countries, the major research question which I want inquire in my thesis is that to what extent had existing factors and changing circumstances internal as well as external affected Georgia's transition to independent, but unconsolidated, undemocratic and fragmented state marred with ethno-territorial conflicts.

Literature Review

Georgia, similar to many post-Soviet union countries and unlike the Central and Eastern European countries, except perhaps the former Yugoslavia, faced much more severe challenges and circumstances at the starting point of its transition from "ancient regime" to independence. Consequently, the Soviet totalitarian system through its long time dictatorial control over Georgia's political, economic and social spheres of life left the country with

unfavorable Soviet legacy in the forms of weak and underdeveloped institutional, political and intellectual background obstructing effective and peaceful regime transition from ancient system and later on, consolidation of state and democracy.

However, similarly to former Yugoslavian and other Caucasian countries, Georgia's transition from Communist regime and subsequent path toward independent nation-state building can be only analyzed through the prism of the complexities and challenges which turned to be detrimental for further consolidation of Georgia's statehood and democracy. Therefore, for Georgia, 'the multiethnic republic in South Caucasus'¹, the early stage of transition period from 1987 to 1992 was characterized by a number of violent military conflicts, such as 'the war over the status of the breakaway region South Ossetia, the civil war for power in Tbilisi, and the war over the status of the breakaway region of Abkhazia'².

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to extend scholarly debate regarding transitions from communism, in which not every case ended up with the consolidation of statehood and democracy rather unstable, unconsolidated states marked by dictatorships or transitional regimes. Particularly, I want to emphasize the article "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Non-cooperative Transitions in the Post-communist World" (2004), in which among the Central and Eastern European countries only eight of them embarked on consolidated democracies, whereas other post-communist states, especially former Soviet union republics fell somewhere in 'shades of dictatorships or unconsolidated transitional regimes'³. The reasons of these differing outcomes, according to McFaul, can be attributed to unequal distribution of power within a country affecting on speed and effectiveness of

¹ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Michael McFaul, "Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World", *World Politics*, Cambridge UP, Vol. 54, No.2, 212-244, (2002), 212.

transition from communist regime and ‘asymmetrical balances of power’⁴ among elites, determining which ideological trajectory a country will follow after subsequent regime change. Moreover, this analysis offers alternative set of causal effects and explanations to the traditional ‘actor-centric literature on third-wave democratization’⁵. In addition, the author further argues that while analyzing transitional and transformational processes in post-Soviet countries, apart from factors considered by third-wave literature, two crucial factors namely ‘the presence or absence territorial disputes and proximity to the West’⁶ should be also taken into account.

Furthermore, since my the study address the causal factors of the interethnic wars and their detrimental effects on the consolidation of Georgia’s statehood, I want to highlight the book “the Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood I the Caucasus” (2007), in which Christoph Zurcher provides explanations and causal effects about the escalations of violent conflicts in the South Caucasus, including Georgia. Besides, the author compares why in some regions facing the same conditions war was avoided, while in other regions with similar causal factors it erupted. Moreover, in his book, Zurcher tries to explain the precipitation of Caucasian wars through ‘the institutional legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism’⁷ and rising nationalistic elites at the transition period.

Methodology

The study aims to contribute to the existing empirical and theoretical analyses regarding post-Soviet transitions and conflict resolution theories. Particularly, by more detailed case study of

⁴ Ibid., 213.

⁵ Ibid., 242.

⁶ Ibid., 214

Georgia with respect to the factors and circumstances affecting consolidation of its statehood during the three presidential rules, I want to contribute to the existing comparative analyses and literature investigating state-building and conflict resolution processes in Georgia. Hence, the thesis is generally based on qualitative case study analysis of Georgia's transition and subsequent attempts made by three presidential rules to build democratic nation-state. Thus, I chose the case study approach in order to test whether or to what extent the Fourth Wave Theory of post-communist transitions elaborated by Michael McFaul explains the case of Georgia. Particularly, in what degree the existing domestic and external factors influenced the dynamics of state building processes in Georgia during three presidential rules, namely Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, and Saakashvili.

Although, I chose single case study namely Georgia, by profound elaboration of the case with respect to transition and conflict resolution approaches the explanation of other cases with similar conditions in post-Soviet sphere can be also possible. Moreover, based on my theory, I emphasized those variables that are meaningful for the analysis, namely Soviet legacy of ethno-federalism, internal fragmentation of Georgian politics, rising nationalism, soviet bureaucracy, arbitrary decision making, corruption and those external factors such as influence of the United States, the European Union and Russia affecting the attempts made by the three Georgian presidents to consolidate country's statehood and democracy. Furthermore, to test explanatory power of theory the method of congruence can be applied, meanwhile in order to determine how an explanatory variable causes or affects an exploratory variable the process tracing method can be used.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter I provides analysis of Gamsakhurdia's rule with respect to factors and circumstances existing at the outset of Georgia's transition from "ancient regime", which had catastrophic effect on Georgia's efforts to avoid fragmentation and consolidate statehood. Basic theoretical approaches in the chapter are transition, state building the institutional legacy of ethno-federalism, nationalism, center-periphery relations, and violent regime change and conflict resolution theories

Chapter II examines causal effects and conditions existing at the beginning of Shevardnadze's regime leading to the Georgian Abkhazian interethnic war having detrimental effects on consolidation of Georgia's state. Besides it analyzes what efforts Shevardnadze government has made to strengthen the state power and promote stability, however ending with extremely corrupted, weakly institutionalized and failed state leading to the regime change. Main theoretical approaches the chapter provides are state- building, center-periphery relations, conflict resolution, transition, international relations and non-violent regime change.

Final chapter investigates why Saakashvili's rule despite strong mandate and international support failed to consolidate statehood and democracy. Besides the chapter provides assessment of Saakashvili's accomplishments with regard to strengthening state power, which were undermined by arbitrary ill-thought policies leading to mass protests and the August War between Russia and Georgia in 2008. However, apart from domestic factors the chapter examines the role of external players and superpowers influencing Georgia's further development and consolidation. Theories which are discussed in chapter are regime change, state building center-periphery relations, democratization, inter-state war, s and authoritarianism.

CHAPTER I – GAMSAKHURDIA’S RULE: TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE AND FAILED CONSOLIDATION OF STATEHOOD (1990-1992)

In the first chapter I will examine those factors and circumstances which at the eve of Georgia’s independence contributed to ‘failed consolidation of Georgian statehood’⁸. Hence, firstly I will analyze the underlying implications of the emerging separatism at the outset of Georgia’s transition, which later transformed into violent ethnic conflicts in the two autonomous republics of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, largely resulting from the ‘the institutional legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism’⁹. Furthermore, raising nationalism among politics directed against minority groups, namely accusing them of obstructing the attempts to establish a unified and independent Georgian nation-state, besides the internal fragmentation within newly emerging national movements ‘dominated by personal rivalries and animosities’¹⁰. Secondly, I will observe the Soviet legacy as the absence of any democratic institutional background, particularly genuine separation of power among government branches, civil society, independent media and political parties to ensure pluralism, democratic transformation and program based politics, in addition the existence of political landscape mainly characterized by personalities resorting to nationalistic and chauvinistic propaganda, thirdly, lack of state capacity to ensure the rule of law and effective governance to avoid civil war and ‘ethno-political conflicts’¹¹, fourthly the external factors, particularly, on the one hand, the roles of major Western democratic players such as the European Union, the United States and NATO and, on the other hand, the role of Russia having a significant

⁸ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 145.

⁹ Ibid. ix.

¹⁰ Ibid., 145.

¹¹ Martin Malek, “State Failure in the South Caucasus: Proposals for an Analytical Framework”, *Transition Studies Review*, 13 (2): 441-460, (2006), 443.

effect on Georgia's transition to sovereignty and subsequent efforts to consolidate statehood and democracy.

1.1. Emerging wars: soviet ethno-federalism, the rise of nationalism and the internal fragmentations of Georgian polities

With the Soviet Union's break up, three interrelated intra-state wars had emerged in Georgia bringing disastrous consequences not only in terms of human suffering but also in terms of unconsolidated state and democracy. The first war flared up in November 1989 and continued up to June with varying intensity. The second war erupted between 'rival'¹² Georgian political groups engaging in fierce power struggle. It started in December 1991 and ended in November 1993 and was precipitated 'by the violent overthrow of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia'¹³ by the joint effort of politicians and paramilitary groups. Third, Georgian – Abkhaz war started in August 1992 and ended in September 1993 'with the defeat of Georgian troops'¹⁴. Therefore, in this sub-chapter I will examine those major circumstances leading to the emergence of the violent internal conflicts which, in turn, had devastating effects on Georgia's attempts to consolidate statehood.

1.1.1. Institutional legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism

In general, 'multinational states'¹⁵ are vulnerable to the escalation of ethnic based conflicts, in some cases even wars, mainly due to the conditions 'when minorities are spatially concentrated, when the social and economic interaction between majority and minority is limited, when there is a history of such conflicts, and when there is regime transition from

¹² Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 116.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Valerie Bunce, "Is Ethno-federalism the Solution or the Problem?" *In Nationalism under Communism: lessons learned* ed. Alina Mungua, and Ivan Krastev (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press 2004), 179-195, 179

dictatorship to democracy'.¹⁶ However, in Georgia, violent ethnic-territorial conflicts, which erupted at the outset of the transition period and had detrimental effects on the statehood, can be largely attributed to the 'destructive mechanism of Soviet ethno-federalism',¹⁷ which on the one hand implied hierarchical ordered 'administrative units and sub-units',¹⁸ in the forms of 'the union center (Moscow) at the top, the union republic (Georgia) in the middle, and finally the autonomous republic of Abkhazia and the autonomous oblast (region) of South Ossetia at the bottom',¹⁹ and on the other hand classification of individuals based on their ethnic nationality as Georgian, rather than civic (non-ethnic) nationality as a citizen of Georgia would be.

Therefore, based on the ethno-federal division of territories, 'titular nations'²⁰ in the Soviet Union, irrespective of their majority or minority status in their autonomous republics, enjoyed substantial privileges which they feared to lose 'by Georgian moves toward independence'.²¹ Hence, despite the fact that Abkhaz made up just '17.8 percent of the entire population of Abkhazia in 1989'²² and Georgians 45.7 percent, Abkhaz not only enjoyed privileged access to 'political and economic resources'²³ but also held the 'key bureaucratic positions'²⁴ in the administration of the autonomous republic. Consequently, with the gradual decline of the Soviet system, 'hierarchical top-down control'²⁵ also started to loosen, precipitating the emergence of secessionist movements at 'lower levels', which in turn caused both groups,

¹⁶Ibid., 179

¹⁷ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 133.

¹⁸ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 120.

¹⁹ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 143.

²⁰ Ibid., 133.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.,143.

Georgians as well as Abkhaz, to mobilize ‘in response to the new circumstances’²⁶. Thus, changing circumstances prompted Georgians to abolish ‘the system of disproportional access to resources to Abkhaz’²⁷ by use of their relative majority, whereas Abkhaz, relying on Moscow’s support, strived to retain the status quo or even improve it.

Besides, ‘mobilization for separatism’²⁸ was facilitated by the institutional background, which in contrast to minority groups without their own autonomous status, provided Abkhazian and South Ossetian local elites with effective mechanisms to mobilize against Georgians. Hence, growing instability in an already feeble Soviet system gave rise to dominance of the national movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which in turn precipitated ‘fierce competition’²⁹ between local national elites for administrative resources. However, in contrast with the Georgian national movement marked by deep confrontation and fragmentation within newly emerged national elites as well as between national elites and incumbent communist officeholders, in the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia both communist office holders and local national elites become united in their struggle to separate from Georgia, exploiting ‘their state and party resources’³⁰ for their national campaign. Consequently, the united efforts of local communist and national elites facilitated to move their ‘separatist activities’³¹ to the legislative bodies (soviets), which in turn was used as the political platform to frequently appeal to Moscow with the demand ‘to be directly subordinated to the Soviet center’³². Thus, acting with the framework of the ‘Soviet procedures’ both legislature bodies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia acquired a ‘certain degree of legitimacy’ that impeded the government’s efforts in Tbilisi to exercise its authority over

²⁶ Ibid.,134.

²⁷ Ibid.,134.

²⁸ Ibid.,134.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

these autonomous territories especially when Georgia itself choose ‘a collision course with Kremlin’³³.

Furthermore, inherited from ‘the Stalin era’³⁴ ‘the principle of divide and rule’³⁵ policies followed especially with respect to Soviet nationality, the ethno-federalism appeared to be a favorable device for the ‘Soviet central government’³⁶ to instigate separatism in the ‘autonomous entities’ often intentionally with the aim to ‘counterbalance’³⁷ nationalist movements in the union republics. Thus ‘titular nations’ in subordinated autonomous entities benefited from this system by acquiring disproportionate privileges enabling them to access political and economic resources, though at the expense of their absolute loyalty to the union center. Consequently, Moscow turned to this strategy against Georgia, first supporting Abkhaz and South Ossetian secessionist aspirations ‘politically’³⁸, then after the conflict escalation, also ‘militarily’³⁹.

³² Ibid.

³³ John Kohan, “Hastening The End of the Empire”, *TIME Magazine*, (January 28,1991) , <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,972214,00.html> (accessed May 10, 2010)

³⁴ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007),134.

³⁵ Ibid., 135.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

1.1.2 Rise of nationalism

The Soviet Union's breakup left Georgia with 'a specific population mixture and institutional design'⁴⁰, which proved to be extremely challenging for Georgia's aspirations towards nation building. Consequently, the ethnic issue has become a major challenge for the Georgian nation building processes, especially when the project, as was the case with Georgia, was based on the idea to define Georgian nationality in 'an ethnically exclusivist way.'⁴¹ Hence, for many Georgians Georgian national identity was associated with 'a (mythological) common origin (Georgian "by blood"), a Georgian culture (especially Georgian language)',⁴² and religion, namely Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Subsequently, ethnic 'national consciousness of Georgians'⁴³ has also become salient for Georgian political nationalism, which assumed that Georgians deserved to have their own sovereign and unified nation-state, however 'only Georgians were considered full members of the nation'⁴⁴. Thus, the issue with respect to the status of ethnic minorities was largely ignored and even by considering the fact that most Georgians showed tolerance towards minorities, few efforts were made to integrate them into the state.

The beginning of 1989 was characterized by the predominance of radical nationalists who organized mass 'demonstrations and hunger strikes'⁴⁵ with the demands of Georgia's full independence from the Soviet Union. In addition, those radicals started to cultivate themes such as 'Georgian victimization, the prohibition of national memory, and the imposition of

⁴⁰ Ghia Nodia, "Georgia: Dimension of Insecurity", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ R. Nalbandov, "Explaining the Success of Foreign Interventions in Intrastate Ethnic Conflicts: Unilateral versus Multilateral Actions" (PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest College, 2008), 112.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Christoph Zurcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 87.

Russian-Soviet foreign rule’⁴⁶ in order to mobilize masses in their struggle for independence. As a result, even incumbent Georgian communist rulers and pro-Communist organizations adopted ‘the main elements of nationalist discourse’⁴⁷ mainly with regard to Georgia’s sovereignty. Hence, due to the lack of consistent and elaborated attitudes within the Georgian political sphere regarding ethnic minority issues the established ideology assumed that ethnic minorities were entitled to stay on Georgian soil and maintain their ethnic culture as long as they were faithful to the national project. Thus, any sign of disloyalty from ethnic minorities with respect to the project was regarded as subversive and served as ‘sufficient moral ground for coercive actions, including expulsion.’⁴⁸ Consequently, being deeply apprehensive of aggressive repercussions from rising Georgian nationalism, ethnic minority groups especially in Abkhazia and South Ossetia started to mobilize around their own national movements with the radical demands to secede from Georgia and instead join the Soviet Union. Georgians, on the other hand, saw threats in the existence of Abkhazian and South Ossetian autonomies and regarded them as the mechanisms created and controlled by Russia to undermine Georgia’s efforts and aspirations towards independence and territorial unity.

For the better explanation of how a rise of nationalism in Georgia and subsequent nationalistic policies and actions precipitated the ethnic tension and then armed conflicts between Georgia and its breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, I will discuss step by step the major decisions and actions made by nationalist politicians and actors which affected the escalation of ethnic tension. Hence, after ‘April 9 massacre’ resulting in the death of 20 demonstrators, among them mostly women and girls, when ‘the Soviet Army violently broke up the demonstrators’⁴⁹ the Georgian national movement further radicalized and the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁹ Ibid p.89

Communist regime lost its legitimacy. Most notable leaders of the newly emerged national movements, at that time, became former dissidents Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Merab Kostava, and Giorgi Chanturia. Thus, struck by the April 9 massacre, even ‘the new Communist leadership’⁵⁰ headed by Givi Gumbaridze, the ex Georgian KGB chairman, adopted the main principles from the agenda of the nationalist opposition. Hence, in August 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, mainly composed of Communists, enacted ‘a language law’⁵¹ requiring the use of the Georgian language compulsory in the public sector all over the country, which in turn evoked sharp resentment among the Abkhazian and South Ossetian population since the majority of them does not speak Georgian. Moreover, in September 1989, Gumbaridze appealed to Moscow with the demand of more autonomy for Georgia to regulate its internal ethnic issues and to form Georgian national ‘armed forces for this purpose.’⁵² Soon after, Georgian Supreme Soviet adopted declaration on Georgia’s sovereignty which abolished all the treaties negotiated by the Soviet regime since 1921. Hence, successive nationalistic steps made by new Communist party leaders ‘provoked alarm among ethnic minorities’⁵³ especially those with an autonomous status namely Abkhazians and South Ossetians.

However, tension among Georgian minority groups reached its highest level when Zviad Gamsakhurdia, first as ‘most prominent and popular opposition leader’⁵⁴, in the large rallies held in Georgia’s capital Tbilisi, often resorted to the rhetoric marked by ethnic chauvinism, denouncing all Georgian minorities especially the Abkhazians and Ossetians as “newcomers”, “traitors” and “pawns of the Kremlin” and regarded them as an ‘obstacle’⁵⁵ in Georgia’s way towards independence. Thus, at the outset of the conflict, the conflicting parties engaged in ‘a

⁵⁰ Ibid p. 90

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Jonathan Wheatley, “Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 122.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

war of laws'. Namely, as a reaction to the language law passed by the Georgian Supreme Soviet, Ossets (majority of whom are Orthodox Christians, while the minority Sunni Muslims⁵⁶) declared Ossetian (which belongs to northeastern group of Iranian languages⁵⁷) as the official language throughout the autonomous region of South Ossetia. Moreover, in November 1989, the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet, the region's highest legislative body, within the framework of the existing constitution addressed to the Supreme Soviet of Georgia and the Supreme Soviet of Soviet Union with the demands to extend the autonomous status 'from autonomous region (AO) to autonomous republic (ASSR)'⁵⁸. However, this demand was understood by the Georgian Communist Party and the national opposition as a move towards separatism and directed against the Georgian national project.

Consequently, opposition leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his allies, by exploiting mounting tensions with South Ossetia, responded with fury to the decision made by the South Ossetian legislature, which envisaged to raise the region's status to sovereign republic, and mobilized up to 30,000 Georgian demonstrators in an attempt to hold a protest demonstration in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, however 'upon entering the city'⁵⁹ the attempt was thwarted by Soviet security forces. Despite the failure to hold protest demonstration in Tskhinvali, the move turned to be beneficial for Gamsakhurdia's further popularity, since first it demonstrated that he was capable of mobilizing large masses, and second he 'was able to force his agenda'⁶⁰ on the incumbent Communist regime. Hence, alarmed by such radical moves of the Georgian nationalists, the leadership of Adamon Nykhas (People's Assembly), the South Ossetian nationalist movement for more autonomy, started 'to form the first militias

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 124.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 125.

in South Ossetia’⁶¹, which in turn served as a warning signal to Georgian population in South Ossetia.

Furthermore, “a war of laws” between the conflicting sides soon entered into a new confrontational path, when ‘in preparation for the first free parliamentary elections’⁶², the Supreme Soviet of Georgia adopted an election law banning regional parties from participating in the elections. Consequently, in September 1990, the regional Soviet of South Ossetia responded to the Georgian move by appealing to Moscow with a claim to remain within the Soviet Union as a Democratic Soviet Republic. Shortly after, in December 1990, South Ossetia held elections, which with the autonomous status of South Ossetia were soon declared as “null and void” by the newly elected parliament of Georgia, in which “the Round Table-Free Georgia coalition”, led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, won the majority of the vote. Constrained by the created circumstances the Georgian government declared a state of emergency in South Ossetia and sent Georgian Interior Ministry troops to Tskhinvali.

Thus, in an attempt to resolve the crisis, in early March, Gamsakhurdia proposed to reduce the autonomous status of South Ossetia to ‘a cultural autonomy’⁶³, instead, Ossetians boycotted the referendum held in March 31, 1991, for the restoration of Georgia’s independence. Moreover, a bit later local authorities of South Ossetia conducted a referendum in the region, in which the majority supported the secession from Georgia and integration with Russia. Therefore, in 1991, as a consequence of this ‘mobilization spiral’⁶⁴ characterized by ‘highly interdependent processes in which each action produced a counteraction’⁶⁵ direct military

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 143.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 143.

conflict erupted in the region of South Ossetia. Lasting 18 months, the war resulted in hundreds of ‘deaths and the expulsion of thousands people’⁶⁶ from both sides. Despite the hostilities still continuing in 1992 with Russia’s occasional involvement, on June 14 in 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Eduard Shevardnadze, and representatives from South and North Ossetia signed an agreement in Sochi, which authorized a ceasefire and withdrawal of all armed forces from the region and instead deployment of joint peacekeeping force composed of by Georgians, Russians and Ossets in July 1992. Consequently, Tbilisi lost de facto control over most of the South Ossetian autonomous region.

1.1.3 Internal fragmentation of Georgian polities

In contrast with the transitions that occurred in the Central and Eastern European countries where the processes were mostly marked by ‘negotiations, self-limiting behavior, and nonviolence of the participants’⁶⁷, implying that the ‘leaders of the opposition’⁶⁸ and ‘the reformist wing of the communist leadership’⁶⁹ managed to reach a compromise on power-sharing in order to ensure ‘peaceful transition’⁷⁰, in Georgia, the transition period was characterized by the internally fragmented opposition, fighting with ‘each other as fiercely as they opposed the Communist authorities’⁷¹. Besides, unwilling to liberalize the political sphere, incumbent regime officeholders further radicalized the newly emerged national movement.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, “Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 123.

⁶⁷ Andras Bozoki, “Democratization in Central Europe”, *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol.4, No.2., 1-27, (2008)

⁶⁸ Ibid p.5

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ghia Nodia, and Alvaro P. Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenge, and Prospects* (Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 9.

Thus, together with the radicalization of ethno-nationalism and subversive institutional legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism, extremely high rate of internal fragmentation of the newly emerged Georgian elite proved to be catastrophic factor for ‘the consolidation of newly won independence.’⁷² In this sub-chapter I will briefly analyze major reasons contributing to the weakness of state and fragmentation of the polities, which can be traced to the malevolent institutional legacy of the Soviet Union in the forms ‘clientelism and patronage networks’⁷³ as most effective informal institution of the Soviet system.

As a consequence, the factors leading to the internal division among Georgian elites and subsequent failure to consolidate state could be largely attributed to first, insufficient power and authority of ‘Georgia’s new nationalists’⁷⁴ to substitute firmly established ‘patronage network’ with more nonpartisan state bureaucracy, second Gamsakhurdia, who ascended to power through popular national upsurge, faced challenge from ‘well-entrenched networks’⁷⁵ which maintained control over key resources, third newly elected Supreme Council of Georgia (hereby parliament) was not represented by influential cronies, old nomenklatura state functionaries, and the ‘urban intelligentsia’⁷⁶ which left Gamsakhurdia and his allies without significant political support, fourth newly elected assembly characterized by lack of experience and expertise precipitated the erosion of the state.

Hence, the first serious collision within the opposition movement emerged with respect to growing tensions in South Ossetia, namely Gamsakhurdia’s radical position toward ‘Ossets’

⁷² Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 135.

⁷³ Christoph Zurcher, “Georgia’s Time of Troubles”, In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 102.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

separatist aspirations'⁷⁷ referring them as “guest” and “newcomers” alienated some of his former allies seeing it damaging ‘to the overall objective of Georgia’s independence from the Soviet Union’⁷⁸. Second, major split had occurred regarding the elections to the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, which was expected to be held in March 1990. Since, the most factions from opposition movement showed distrust to Soviet institutions they agreed to hold elections to alternative parliament and for that purpose formed a National Forum. However encountering with mounting criticism for his radical nationalistic stance on the South Ossetian issue, Gamsakhurdia defected from the National Forum and instead established loose “the Round Table-Free Georgia coalition”, which took part in the Supreme Council elections on October 28, 1990. Elections ended favorably for the coalition, receiving ‘54 percent of the vote and 155 out of 250 seats’⁷⁹. However, on September 30, the Supreme Council elections were preceded by the elections to the alternative parliament in which the opposition groups from the National Forum participated. Hence, two parties the National Independence Party and National Democratic Party, led by Giorgi Chanturia appeared to be winners passing 50 percent threshold. The alternative parliament received political backing from powerful paramilitary group Mkhedrioni (knights), headed by Jaba Ioseliani, who himself become member of the alternative parliament.

Therefore, failing to harness the political and economic resources of nomenclature patronage networks, Gamsakhurdia with his allies resorted to ‘ethno-national mobilization’⁸⁰ as a way to maintain power, which in turn led to detrimental consequences and state collapse. Moreover, fierce, uncompromising internal confrontation among the Georgian elites, the essence of which was about the personalities and ambitions of different leaders rather than disagreements

⁷⁷ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 135.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

about tactics, as well as unconsolidated state contributed to the spark of three violent intra-state wars since the independence of Georgia. As a consequence of the fierce confrontation within Georgian politics, by the end of the year 1990, two parliaments, the Supreme Council of Georgia and the National Congress existed in Georgia. Although both assemblies were mostly represented by radical nationalists, it was the National Congress, which was supported by powerful military groups. Hence, although national mobilization contributed to the electoral victory of Gamsakhurdia, it failed to achieve success with respect to ‘state unity’⁸¹. In 1991, the defection of the National Guard together with its leader Tengiz Kitovani and the Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, which was linked to President Gamsakhurdia’s ambiguous stance toward August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow, hastened Gamsakhurdia’s overthrow and subsequent regime change. In January 1992, a military coup ‘led by unlikely coalition of former communist nomenclature, paramilitary leaders and liberal intelligentsia’⁸² ended with Gamsakhurdia’s expulsion and establishment of the provisional military council administered by paramilitary groups, National Guard and Mkhedrioni.

1.2 Soviet legacy: absence of democratic institutions and failed state

Collapse of the Soviet Union led to emergence of independent Georgia, ‘but collapse also saddled it with the institutions and the elites that precluded a rapid transition to democracy, civil society, rule of law and the market’⁸³. Consequently, Georgia inherited the system, in which ‘no separation of power had ever existed’ since everything was under totalitarian

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Jonathan Wheatley, “Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 123.

⁸³ Alexander Motyl, “State, Nation, and Elites in Independent Ukraine”, In *Contemporary Ukraine, Dynamics of Post-Soviet Transformation*, ed. Taras Kuzio, (M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp.290.

monopoly of Communist Party⁸⁴. In this sub-chapter I will analyze how the Soviet legacy as the absence of democratic institutions and political landscape mainly characterized by personalities turning to authoritarianism and extreme nationalism affected the state and nation building process in Georgia.

In Georgia state institutions during Gamsakhurdia's rule were feeble and unstable due to their early stage of state-building process. However, despite absence of effective state institutions and the rule of law, Gamsakhurdia's failure to establish nation-state can be largely attributed to his authoritarian stance and extreme nationalism leading to fragmentation of the state rather than its consolidation. Although among other leaders of the anti-Communist movement Zviad Gamsakhurdia emerged as the most charismatic leader leading to him to sweeping electoral victories, 'other leaders in resistance did not accept his pre-eminence legitimate'⁸⁵. Even though Gamsakhurdia's rule enjoyed strong popular support, opponents started to accuse it of authoritarianism, since being overborne by its popularity the government tended to portray the opposition as hostile to the state rather than to the government.

Furthermore, growing dissatisfaction was concerned with the disproportional power of the President. Namely, elected for a five year-term, the President of Georgia possessed authority to 'veto any legislative act passed by parliament within two weeks of its adoption'⁸⁶. Besides he had power to declare war, 'to nominate the Prime Minister, the Supreme Court chairman, the State Prosecutor and the commanders of the armed forces'⁸⁷. In addition, human rights violations became alarming due to the cases of political imprisonments; moreover media

⁸⁴ Mykola Riabchuk, "Ukraine: Managers of the Gray Zone", Review of *Understanding Ukrainian Politics: Power, Politics, and Institutional Design*, by Paul D'Anieri. *Transition Online*(2008), 2.

⁸⁵ Ghia Nodia, and Alvaro P. Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenge, and Prospects* (Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 9.

⁸⁶ Cathy Cosman, Rachel Denber and Jeri Laber, "Conflict in Georgia: Human Rights Violations by the Government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia", *News From Helsinki Watch*, Vol.no.3 issue no.16, 1-18, (1991),4.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

facilities came under strong government pressure as well, particularly all the independent publications except two were forced to close down. Dissatisfaction grew in a large part of Georgia's society alleging Gamsakhurdia's rule in dictatorship and misgovernance. Besides, his arbitrary style of governance alienated many of his closest supporters and his extreme ethnic nationalism significantly damaged his reputation in the West. As a consequence, Gamsakhurdia failed 'to consolidate his political position'⁸⁸ and to exercise state control over paramilitary groups the National Guard and Mkhedrioni leading to eruption of the ethno-territorial conflicts and a military coup d'état, which ended with Gamsakhurdia's overthrow.

Therefore, upon considering the main challenges and changing circumstances by the time of Georgia's transition to its independence resulted in a 'weak transition state quickly degenerating into failed state'⁸⁹. This occurred due to the large extent of the new Georgian elites turned out to be unable to manage the emerged transitional challenges since first they were internally divided, second they faced two separatist movements, and third failed to compromise with old members of nomenklatura or gain access to the 'remaining state structures'⁹⁰ because of their radical anti-Communist stance. Thus, the only meaningful resource, which the new elites chose to rely on, became 'nationalist populism'⁹¹.

1.3 External effects

In this sub-chapter I will analyze to what extent outside factors such as 'neighborhood effects'⁹², geopolitical location and the roles of main political actors such as the United States, the European Union and Russia with respect to Georgia had an influence on outcomes of

⁸⁸ Christoph Zurcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 108.

⁸⁹ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 147.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Georgia's troubled transition. Three main external effects can be highlighted, which in varying degrees had impact on conflict dynamics in Georgia namely the role of Diaspora assisting separatists movements, unfavorable 'geo-strategic location'⁹³, and foreign intervention.

1.3.1 Role of diaspora in ethnic conflicts

Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists did not depend only on their domestic mobilization, since both regimes received substantial support from 'Diaspora groups and ethnic kin groups'⁹⁴ in their struggle for secession from Georgia. Particularly, the South Ossetian rebels were heavily supported by their ethnic kin from North Ossetia in terms of finances, 'supplies and manpower'⁹⁵. Abkhazians, on the other hand, received volunteers and fighter units from North Caucasian countries, plus additional support from the Abkhazian diaspora in Turkey. Most effective and notable of these units was the Abkhazian Battalion of Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basaev comprising approximately 300 fighters.⁹⁶

1.3.2 Georgia's geo-strategic location

Georgia's geopolitical position is strategically important and 'conflict-prone'⁹⁷ at the same time, since throughout history it has become subject to intersection of rival powers: first Persian, Ottoman and the Tsarist empires, and recently the Soviet Union. The most notable impact of the empire rivalries on sociopolitical and cultural landscape of the Caucasus can be attributed to the relatively weakly developed statehood. Besides, the mountainous

⁹²Dirk Berg-Schlosser, "'Neighborhood Effects' of Democratization in Europe", *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 4. No.2, 29-45, (2008), 1.

⁹³ Christoph Zurcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 109.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 110.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 109.

geographical terrain of the Caucasus proved to be unfavorable for local rulers as well as colonial powers to ‘establish stable administrations’⁹⁸. However, in the short period of time from 1998 to 1993, when Georgia suffered from ethnic-territorial conflicts, the most important external factors leading to conflict escalation were interrelations between local institutions with the center in Moscow. Whereas at that time, other political powers usually interested in the South Caucasus, namely Turkey, Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the United States, and the European Union showed little interest to somehow influence conflict dynamics in Georgia.

1.3.3 Neighborhood effects and foreign policy

The emergence of ethno national mobilization in Georgia was precipitated not only by contesting movements of Georgians, Ossetians, and Abkhazians but was also largely affected by national movements among the Balts and the Armenians, since elites and the general public in all the Soviet republics closely monitored efforts of other movements, and every successful mobilization served as a stimulus for other national movements creating “demonstrative effect”⁹⁹. The next important external factor influencing subsequent ethnic conflicts in Georgia is Russia, the largest and most powerful successor state of the Soviet Union. Although Russia played an important role in processes taking place in Georgia it would be an exaggeration to blame Russia of all Georgia’s troubles occurring in the early period of transition, since Moscow at that time did not possessed sufficient power even ‘to formulate a coordinated policy’¹⁰⁰ due to its rapid economic downfall and ‘ongoing power

⁹⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 111, see more in Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

struggles in the Kremlin'¹⁰¹. Hence, the examples of these poorly designed and executed policies such as Yerevan Airport in July 1988, April 9 massacre in Tbilisi in 1989, or the bloody Sunday in Baku in January 1990 further accelerated the erosion of the soviet statehood and at the same time precipitated 'conflicts within Georgia'¹⁰².

In conclusion, it can be deduced that along with failure in the domestic politics, Gamsakhurdia's foreign policy turned out to be also unsuccessful, since he could not succeed in winning broad international support from international actors, plus his relations with Moscow entered into extremely confrontational path due to Russia's direct and indirect involvement in the conflict in South Ossetia. In addition, he failed to establish diplomatic relations with Western political community because of his extreme nationalism and authoritarian tendencies. Consequently, the Western actors denied Georgia's acceptance in any international organizations leading to international isolation of the country, 'which lasted until Shevardnadze's return to Tbilisi in March 1992'¹⁰³. Hence it follows that the failure of the Gamsakhurdia's rule to consolidate Georgia's statehood was largely due to the factors such as Soviet ethno-federalism, which after the dissolution the Soviet Union opened opportunities for titular nations in the autonomous republics and regions to break away, besides since Gamsakhurdia's main strategy was only extreme nationalistic appeals to mobilize Georgians the strategy backfired and ethnic conflicts had emerged, since mobilization was paralleled in the autonomous entities as well demanding separation from Georgia. Next factor can be ascribed to the changes in the center periphery relations, which was largely exacerbated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and with it its control over the union republics. As a result, the interest of the union republic, namely Georgia turned out to

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ B. Nyamaa and I. Munteanu, "Georgia in The Big Power Game: A Victim or A Villain?" (MA thesis, Roskilde University, 2009), 75.

be incompatible with the interest of titular nations in autonomous entities, namely the Abkhazia and South Ossetia which provoked parallel national mobilizations however in case of Georgia the national demand was to secede from Soviet Union, whereas in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia demands were to secede from Georgia and to join the Soviet Union or later Russian Federation. Moreover, despite his strong popular mandate, Gamsakhurdia lacked access to political and economic resources essential for the consolidation of the statehood, since these resources were concentrated in the hands of old nomenclature networks which were beyond the control of Gamsakhurdia and added with his confrontational, authoritarian and highly nationalistic character of governance he not only failed to negotiate with adversaries but turned many of his allies into bitter foes. As a result, Gamsakhurdia's chosen strategy for the consolidation of the Georgia's statehood and democracy failed since it was only based on vague ideas of ethnic nationalism, which turned to be inconsistent with an ethnically diverse country such as Georgia.

CHAPTER II – SHEVARDNADZE’S RULE: “FROZEN CONFLICTS”, STATE CAPTURE AND SEMI-AUTOCRATIC REGIME (1992-2003)

In this chapter I will investigate the major factors and changing circumstances in the period of Shevardnadze’s rule leading to the failed state and the Rose Revolution in 2003. First, I will start my analysis with the escalation of the armed conflict in Abkhazia at the outset of Shevardnadze’s return, namely I will examine the main implications of the ethnic conflict and extent they have affected subsequent efforts made by incumbent Shevardnadze and his administration to consolidate statehood, promote liberalization and stability in Georgia. Next, I will look at the reasons contributing to undermining the legitimacy of the Georgian state not only in the eyes of Georgia’s citizens but also in the eyes of international community, to a large extent precipitated by the failure of Shevardnadze’s rule to carry out necessary reforms and policies to avoid an unconsolidated state characterized by state capture, impoverished economy and authoritarianism.

2.1 Abkhaz-Georgian war and its effects

In the early 1990s, the principal challenge for Georgia was to maintain its territorial integrity. However, due to the ethnic-territorial conflicts erupting in two regions of the country, the Georgian government lost its jurisdiction over two territories: from 1992, in the former Autonomous District of Ossetia, and in 1993 in the former Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. On May 14 1994, the warring parties signed in Moscow the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces and agreed to the deployment of a peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), composed of mainly Russian troops¹⁰⁴. The peacekeeping operation was monitored by the UN observers mission UNOMIG. Since then these two regions are de facto governed by separatist regimes and the issue of Georgia’s territorial integrity remains unresolved. Largely backed by Russia, these two regions have often been called “zones of frozen conflict”, which means that there is no final resolution of these conflicts and unstable peace is often interrupted by low-scale violence. Hence, in the

¹⁰⁴ Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights: RULAC Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts. Current Conflict: The Russia-Georgia Conflict.

sub-chapter I will evaluate major factors and implications of the escalation of Abkhaz-Georgian armed conflict and how it affected subsequent efforts made by Shevardnadze and his government to consolidate Georgia's statehood.

2.1.1 Armed conflict in Abkhazia: internal and external factors

The aftermath of Gamskhurdia's expulsion in January 1992, Georgia came under de facto control by the warlords, namely the leaders of the National Guard and the Mkhedrioni (knights) Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani. Later, the paramilitary commanders jointly with the former Prime Minister Sigua established the Military Council as the form of provisional government. However, the leaders soon realized that they lacked the necessary domestic and international legitimacy and were confronted with complex set of challenges such as ongoing disintegration of the country, proclaimed 'their commitment to democracy'¹⁰⁵ and called all political groups for cooperation. Later on, the leaders of the Military Council invited Eduard Shevardnadze, former Soviet foreign minister during Gorbachev's most progressive period, and offered him to take responsibility of the state.

Albeit his communist past serving in a number of high rank positions in the Communist Party during the Soviet Union, Shevardnadze had some credentials with the international actors and with the Georgian liberals, who regarded him as an experienced statesman capable of 'leading the country out of civil war'¹⁰⁶, particularly to respond to the existing major challenges such as conflicting situations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, plus the deposed President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's defiance towards current authorities operating with units loyal to him in western Georgia. In addition, Russia started to push Georgia 'to join the newly established Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)'¹⁰⁷ and to give consent on the Russian military presence in Georgia. Thus, Shevardnadze's power at that time mainly relied on military warlords, Ioseliani and Kitovani.

http://www.adh-geneva.ch/RULAC/current_conflict.php?id_state=184 (accessed May 24, 2010)

¹⁰⁵ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 129.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

While the conflict in South Ossetia tended to pacify, in Abkhazia it started to re-escalate with new intensity. However, as was the case with the conflict in South Ossetia, the conflict in Abkhazia first started with “the war of laws” enacted by respective legislative bodies. Particularly, on August 1990, the Supreme Soviet (Council) of Abkhazia declared ‘Abkhazia to be a union republic within the Soviet Union’¹⁰⁸, which immediately abolished by the Georgian counterpart. However, despite serious attempts by Gamsakhurdia and Ardzinba, the chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet, to reach a compromise on the power sharing arrangement, which considered reforming the electoral system in such a way that ‘electoral districts would be demarcated according to ethnic lines’¹⁰⁹, implying that in the new 65-seat Abkhazian Assembly, the Georgian population in the autonomous republic Abkhazia (45.7 percent in 1989) would receive 26 seats, the Abkhaz (17.8 percent) would receive 28 seats and other groups (Armenians 14.6 percent, Russians 14.3 percent) ‘would receive the remaining 11 seats’¹¹⁰, moreover, according to the new electoral system, resolutions on the constitutional issues required two-thirds majority, thus making it possible to adopt constitutional amendments only through the consent of other main group members.

However, after the collapse of Gamsakhurdia’s government the aforementioned ‘power-sharing deal’ was immediately abandoned by the conflicting sides, firstly because Shevardnadze’s administration tried ‘to delegitimize Gamsakhurdia’¹¹¹ and portray the deal as “betrayal of the national interest”, secondly, Abkhazian leadership, on their side, tried to take advantage of the critical situation created in Georgia and pushed more radical demands towards secession. Consequently, on July 23, 1992 the Supreme Council of Abkhazia’s autonomous republic disregarding the 1991 agreement between Gamsakhurdia and Ardzinba reinstated the draft 1925 Abkhazian Constitution that considered Abkhazia to be a sovereign state.

The Georgian-Abkhazian armed conflict erupted on August 14, 1992 when nearly 5000 soldiers of the Georgian National Guard entered the territory of Abkhazia for two reasons: first to protect the railroad from robbery and looting and second ‘to hunt down the supporters

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,130.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

of Gamsakhurdia who had kidnapped government officials'¹¹². However the Abkhaz saw hidden motives behind this Georgian move, and branded it as an invasion on their territory with the aim to suppress the 'Abkhazian independence movement'¹¹³. For Georgians, on their side, the territory of Abkhazia was considered as a part of Georgia and they saw nothing contravening in their move.

Although, at the outset of the conflict, Georgian troops led by Kitovani succeeded in occupying Sukhumi, which gave the impression and confidence to the administration in Tbilisi that victory could be easily achieved, gradually with the crucial support from Northern Caucasus, Cossacks from Russia's southern provinces, and most importantly, reinforcements, including 'Russian military equipment and logistics'¹¹⁴, received from the Russian military bases located in Gudauta and Ochamchira, the Abkhaz forces managed to retake Sukhumi and take most of the territory under their control. On the other hand, the Georgian side also received weapons and other military equipment 'exclusively from the Russian supplies'¹¹⁵. On 27 September, 1993, Sukhumi fell to the Abkhazian separatist forces resulting in expulsion of demoralized National Guard out of the Abkhaz controlled territory. The consequences of the Abkhaz-Georgian armed conflict can be assessed by 20 000 casualties from both sides and more than 250000 ethnic Georgian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), which turned to be 'the longest and bloodiest of the wars'¹¹⁶, which Georgia had to experience since its independence.

Thus, the end of the conflict was confirmed by a ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia deploying 3000 Russian peacekeepers in July 1994 under the mandate of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (C.I.S.), the successor body to the Soviet Union, and monitored by 136 military observers of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (U.N.O.M.I.G.). Although the ceasefire agreement contributed to ending the war, it failed to provide an effective mechanism to facilitate peace process, since 'negotiations on resolving the conflict

¹¹² Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: the Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1994), 107.

¹¹³ Ibid., 107.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Anderson and Louis Hammond, "Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict", *Human Rights Watch Arms Project: Human Rights Watch/Helsinki*, Vol.7, No.7, (1995), 7.

¹¹⁵ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 141.

¹¹⁶ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: the Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1994), 108.

remain deadlocked’¹¹⁷ and sporadic skirmishes still occur. Defeated Georgia, under Shevardnadze’s leadership, became reluctant to join the C.I.S. and to sign a series of agreements and treaties with respect to security cooperation. Moreover, in June 1994, Georgia agreed to maintain three military bases in Georgia and to deploy Russian peacekeepers in the breakaway region of Abkhazia.

Therefore, speaking about Russia’s role in Georgian politics and its interference in the Georgian Abkhazian conflict, I want to highlight the controversy, surrounding this issue, that despite the fact that Moscow had officially declared its neutrality in the conflict, the degree and extent of military and political concessions made by Georgia in favor of Russia raised well-founded doubts among some analysts who contend that Georgia’s defeat in the conflict was in Russia’s strategic interest since it made Georgia more willing to accede to the terms which strengthened Russia’s positions in the region.

2.1.2 Conflict aftermath and attempts to consolidate state

After Georgia’s defeat, Abkhazia fell under the control of separatist governance hence outside of any Georgian state influence. Besides, the highly divided and weakened central Georgian state caused by internal conflicts proved to be incapable to exercise enough control over other parts of Georgia. The autonomous republic of Adjara, while remaining largely peaceful, was governed by local authoritarian leader, Aslan Abashidze, who had been initially appointed by President Gamsakhurdia and ruled Adjara by his own decree. Moreover, the situation in Georgia’s western region Samegrelo remained also highly volatile due to the armed supporters of ex-President Gamsakhurdia maintaining control over the area. Finally, the central government’s control over Georgia’s southern region of Javakheti, mainly inhabited by Armenians, and over the southeastern region of Kvemo Kartly, mostly resided by Azerbaijani minorities did not look favorable as well.

¹¹⁷ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 133.

Consequently, Georgia, at the outset of its independence, was marred with extreme instability and disorder, which was incomparable even with other former Soviet Union countries. Hence, the incidents of lootings committed by armed criminal gangs become ubiquitous at that time. Thanks to malfunctioning state, which proved to be incapable to provide even basic public goods, real power fell in the hands of powerful paramilitary groups, the National Guard and Mkhedrioni, which after Gamsakhurdia's overthrow asserted their interest in lucrative businesses, Mkhedrioni started to control the gasoline and tobacco trade, whereas National Guard dominated 'the arms trade'.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the war in Abkhazia, lasting 13 months, depleted the potential of the country 'to introduce market reforms'¹¹⁹ and rebuild the deteriorated economy. Moreover severed ties with Russia affected important transportation links and routes leading to closure and bankruptcy of major factories as well as industries due to the lack of supplies. Besides, public transportation in Tbilisi had to shut down because of aggravated energy shortages. Therefore, loss of control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia considerably diminished Georgia's economic potential, since these areas produced a significant portion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) totaling one billion U.S. dollars before the wars. As a result, Georgian economy plummeted with alarming pace, since based on official figures 'GDP fell by 20.1 percent in 1991, by 44.2 percent in 1992, and by 29.3 percent in 1993'.¹²⁰

On October 11, 1992 when the armed conflict in Abkhazia was in progress, new parliamentary elections were held in Georgia, in which 'Shevardnadze was overwhelmingly' ¹²¹ elected receiving '96 percent of the vote on a 74 percent turnout.'¹²² Although ousted President Gamsakhurdia declared the results rigged and invalid, international monitors assessed the elections as 'fairly democratic'.¹²³ Shortly after, on November 6, 1992 the newly elected parliament adopted the law on State Power making Shevardnadze Parliamentary Chairman, Supreme Commander of Armed Forces, and Head of State. Despite

¹¹⁸ Christoph Zurcher, "Georgia's Time of Troubles", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 105.

¹¹⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: the Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1994), 109.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 124.

¹²¹ Ghia Nodia, and Alvaro P. Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenge, and Prospects* (Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 11.

¹²² Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 132.

the fact that the majority of the members supported Shevardnadze, the new Parliament of Georgia was highly fragmented. Later, on August 24, 1995 new Constitution, mainly modeled on the American system, was ratified. The adoption of the new Constitution was branded as significant step towards democracy. On November 5, 1995 Shevardnadze became Georgia's President winning 74 percent of votes based on official figures.

By winning successive elections Shevardnadze received democratic and constitutional legitimacy necessary to consolidate power. However, after defeats in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Shevardnadze was confronted with Ioseliani and Kitovani, powerful paramilitary leaders who had invited Shevardnadze to Georgia in 1992, apparently with hope that they could control him by their paramilitary forces. Thus, in an effort to introduce some degree of central authority, Shevardnadze started to rebuild Georgian police force while gradually incorporating the paramilitary groups, especially Mkhedrioni, into the newly formed structure. At the end of 1993, Shevardnadze still used Mkhedrioni and Ioseliani in western Georgia to defeat the rebelling forces loyal to ex-President Gamsakhurdia. Meanwhile, Shevardnadze took over Kitovani by dismissing him in May 1993 and integrating the National Guard into the state structure. Later the former commander of the National Guard was arrested, after leading a group of 1000 lightly-armed supporters in a reckless attempt to win back Abkhazia. Finally, in August 1995, accused of an assassination attempt against Shevardnadze, Ioseliani was put under arrest. Hence, after series of successful tactics Shevardnadze managed to neutralize the National Guard and Mkhedrioni leading to further consolidation of his power.

2.2 Failed State: Semi-authoritarian rule and state capture

The devastating war in Abkhazia turned to be crucial breaking-point for Shevardnadze, since the war significantly undermined Georgia's already weakened potential necessary to consolidate state, promote democracy and market economy. Hence, by assuming power, Shevardnadze faced a highly fragmented country with malfunctioning institutions conflicting with separatist movements. However main reason of further state failure during Shevardnadze's rule was the lack of clearly defined ideology what kind of state to build and

‘whose state it should be.’¹²⁴ Despite the strong popular mandate and credentials with international community, Shevardnadze’s regime quickly plunged deeply into corruption, which undermined state’s capacity ‘to exercise its core functions’¹²⁵. This sub-chapter explores factors and circumstances leading to failed state, which followed by subsequent change of Shevardnadze’s regime.

2.2.1 Semi-authoritarian rule

Even though Shevardnadze’s government detached itself from the extreme nationalist tendencies, it failed to formulate clearly which policies to pursue whether pro-Western or pro-Russian, which in turn affected its ability to elaborate further strategies. Hence, political system under Shevardnadze’s leadership can be characterized as neo-patrimonial hybrid regime in which some minor liberalization of political and civic activities were allowed, however actual political and economic power were centralized in rather ‘narrow power elite’¹²⁶ which prevented other political groups from genuine political competition and participation. Thus, Shevardnadze’s regime was based on “clientelistic” networks of power elite concentrating around ‘the personality of the President’¹²⁷.

Furthermore, to somehow stabilize the political climate marked by high confrontational politics, fragmented society and chaos, Shevardnadze resorted to “balance of power politics” that implied to incorporate members of different political groups and factions into his power elite and ‘maintain balance between them’¹²⁸. However, thanks to malfunctioning public administration and corrupted government political system lacked ability to provide public good for the population of Georgia, instead it supplied “network goods” to those who represented particular network within the power elite.

¹²⁴ Ghia Nodia, “Georgia: Dimension of Insecurity”, In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 65.

¹²⁵ Jonathan Wheatley, “Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 124.

¹²⁶ Ghia Nodia, and Alvaro P. Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenge, and Prospects* (Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 13.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

In early period of his presidency, Shevardnadze facilitated the emergence of pro-democratic institutions and actors with aim to build relationship ‘with western governments and financial institutions.’¹²⁹ Hence, within his ruling party, Shevardnadze promoted so called “young reformers” team, headed by Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili, which was mostly represented by western- educated policy makers and technocrats from moderate wing. As a result, the reformers team not only controlled ruling party, but in 1995, one of its leaders Zhvania became Parliamentary Speaker, second most powerful leader in Georgia, whereas Saakashvili became chairman of the leading Parliamentary committee responsible for legal issues. Besides relative liberalization of political sphere, including ‘legislative framework’,¹³⁰ contributed to emergence of a civil society and free media, including Rustavi 2, which in turn challenged the policies pursued by Shevardnadze’s inner circle marked by old, corrupted former apparatchiks. Along this line, disagreements started to intensify between the reformers and old nomenclature elite, representing coterie of Shevardnadze, since latter preferred to run the country in the old way and tried to obstacle ongoing reform processes.

In addition, large number of meaningful laws was adopted during the second half of 1990s, which mostly were in the line of ‘Western models and advice’¹³¹ largely contributing to bringing Georgia to European standards and subsequent Georgia’s admission, as the first country in the South Caucasus at that time, to the Council of Europe in 1999 . However, the newly adopted laws by making all information with respect to government agencies public became efficient mechanism for existing NGOs and investigative journalists to uncover and make public the malpractices done by incumbent government officials. Apprehensive for the safety of his corrupted regime, Shevardnadze resorted to authoritarian tactics by attempting to monitor and restrict the activities of the media as well as civil society however the efforts were not effective and ‘even backfired’¹³². Hence, the state under the Shevardnadze’s rule was powerless and lacked any resources to carry out harsher policies, besides Shevardnadze often was ‘irresolute about repressions’¹³³, since many of his ardent critics were representatives of his own power elite.

¹²⁹ Giorgi Kandelaki and Giorgi Meladze, “Enough! Kmara and The Rose Revolution in Georgia”, In *Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Joerg Forbrig and Pavol Demes, (GMF, ERSTE Stiftung, 2007), 103.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 102.

¹³¹ Ghia Nodia, and Alvaro P. Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenge, and Prospects* (Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 13.

¹³² Michael McFaul, “Transition from Postcommunism”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, (2005), 7.

¹³³ Ibid., 8.

2.2.2 State capture

Lawlessness, clientelism and widespread corruption become hallmark of the regime Shevardnadze. Instead to provide public goods and ensure the rule law, “state capture” became mechanism for Shevardnadze’s state ‘to serve the private or group benefits of the narrow power elite’. Besides, political and economic life of Georgia became characterized by informal political and business transactions within network groups of power elite motivated by their private or narrow group interests. Pervasive corruption even obstructed state’s ability to collect taxes which led to incapacity of state institutions to implement its core responsibilities. Moreover, inadequate salaries received by public employees encouraged them to be engaged in corrupt dealings such as bribery or other illegal activities. As a result, based on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Georgia’s corruption score was ‘124th among 133 rated nations in 2003’¹³⁴. Due to the failure of Shevardnadze’s government to curb corruption activities contributed to the suspension of International Monetary Fund programs.

Furthermore, in regions and rural areas especially inhabited with mostly national minority populations, most people lacked opportunity to access these network goods, concentrated in narrow circle of power elite, which made them completely disengaged from the public sphere and only left on their own survival. Consequently, the large part of Georgia’s population lost any trust in the government and started to demand for radical changes. Besides rampant corruption and dysfunctional Shevardnadze’s state further aggravated state security, when the government, since 1999, lost control over Pankisi region, the area bordering on the Chechen Republic. Due to the war in Chechnya, thousands refugees escaping from the war find harbor in this area, since some of them were anti-Russian insurgents, Moscow started to blame Georgia for assisting terrorists. Moreover, the area become the safe haven for illegal arms trade, drug trafficking and kidnappings, in which high government officials were also involved. However the changing circumstances after September 11, 2001, the Pankisi area became concern for the International security as well, basically for the United States and

¹³⁴ Ghia Nodia, “Georgia: Dimension of Insecurity”, In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 67.

Russia, which in turn demanded from Georgia to undertake more decisive steps towards resolving unstable situation, which was created in the region.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy conducted by Shevardnadze marked by shifting it from pro-Russian to more pro-Western. At the early period of his rule, Shevardnadze pursued more pro-Moscow politics by accessing to the C.I.S. and signing Collective Security Treaty, hence acceding Russian military bases to stay on the Georgia's territory. Presumably, his more pro-Russian stance was precipitated by his expectancy that Russia will provide Georgia with assistance with respect to its territorial integrity and ethnic conflicts. Thus, first term of Shevardnadze's presidency was characterized by relatively neutral relations with Moscow, Washington and Brussels. However, since second half of 1990s, Shevardnadze's foreign policy preferences has become more pro-Western, besides in 2002, he officially appealed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization with the demand 'to invite Georgia to be the member of the alliance',¹³⁵.

In conclusion, to sum up Shevardnadze's rule, I want to emphasize some of its achievements and major failures in the efforts to consolidate the statehood. Hence, when Shevardnadze first assumed power, after the military coup which deposed Gamsakhurdia, he, with the assistance of Russia, reached ceasefire agreement with the breakaway region South Ossetia in 1992. However, facing resurgent and belligerent ousted President Gamsakhurdia who had mobilized armed groups in western Georgia, Shevardnadze fall in ethnic nationalist trap and supported the military intervention in Abkhazia, in which Georgia was defeated and inflicted detrimental consequences with respect to human suffering, destruction and the consolidation of statehood. Besides, with the support from Russia, Shevardnadze could defeat Gamsakhurdia and his supporting insurgents in western Georgia though lost large part of Georgia's territory. However he still managed to achieve progresses towards consolidation of state by introducing new constitution in 1995. Furthermore, the state's monopoly of power strengthened under Shevardnadze's rule, which was the result of marginalization and reintegration of the paramilitary groups into the newly formed armed forces. In addition, although Shevardnadze succeeded to shift from ethnic nationalist discourse, meaning that ethnic minorities no more regarded as "guests", he still failed to introduce in Georgia civic concept of Georgian citizenship which would be more inclusive and effective way for integration minorities into

¹³⁵ B. Nyamaa and I. Munteanu, "Georgia in the Big Power Game: A Victim or A Villain?" (MA thesis, Roskilde University, 2009), 75.

Georgia's state. Instead, he chose old Soviet practice through which the regime of Shevardnadze incorporated high rank national minorities into 'patronage network'¹³⁶. Therefore, it can be concluded that mainly due to the failure of Shevardnadze's government to exercise the 'basic core functions of statehood'¹³⁷ such as the rule of law, security and provision of basic public goods, the incumbent 'lost all trust and credibility'¹³⁸ in the public eye as domestically as well as internationally. Moreover, fraudulent parliamentary elections conducted in 2003 further undermined his legitimacy leading to people's outrage and massive protests, which lasted almost two weeks and culminated with non-violent overthrow of Shevardnadze's rule in November 2003. The event was labeled as the Rose Revolution, which brought the new government under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili in power.

¹³⁶ Bruno Coppieters, "Locating Georgian Security", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 362.

¹³⁷ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 127.

¹³⁸ Martina Huber, "State-building in Georgia: Unfinished and at Risk?", *Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 'Clingendael'*, 1-86, (2004), 27.

CHAPTER III – SAKASHVILI’S RULE: COMPROMISING DEMOCRACY, UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN GEORGIAN STATE AND THE AUGUST WAR 2008

After peaceful ousting of Shevardnadze’s government by popular uprising, known as the Rose Revolution, the newly formed government under the leadership of Saakashvili set its primary goals prioritizing the consolidation of the state power and restoration of Georgia’s territorial integrity. However, among the government’s priorities, democracy building was largely disregarded resulting in unsuccessful state-building and poor decision making, which in turn contributed to mass public outrage and the August War in 2008. Thus, by ‘compromising democracy’¹³⁹, the regime of Saakashvili undermined those achievements which Georgia attained since 2004. This chapter will attempt to examine those reasons, factors and circumstances, existing during Saakashvili’s rule, which contributed to the unsuccessful consolidation of Georgia’s statehood and failure to avoid the August War in the breakaway region of South Ossetia in 2008.

3.1 Undemocratic efforts to consolidate state power

Despite high expectations from public and international community that the peaceful regime change named as the Rose Revolution would bring to Georgia more democracy, the rule of law, new opportunities for economic prosperity and new peaceful efforts to resolve “frozen conflicts” aftermath of it proved that, whatever public expectations was, there was nothing liberal and democratic in the intentions of the newly emerged government elite headed by the President Saakashvili. In the sub-chapter I will attempt to analyze the efforts made by Saakashvili’s regime to increase the power of state throughout the country and what subsequent impact these efforts had on the Georgia’s statehood and democracy.

¹³⁹ Lincoln A. Mitchell, “Compromising democracy: state building in Saakashvili’s Georgia”, *Central Asian Survey*, 171-183, Vol.28, (2009), 171.

3.1.1 Increase of state power at the expense of democracy

Whatever the characteristics of the Rose Revolution, implying its nonviolent manner of regime change, it was ‘not pacted or negotiated’¹⁴⁰ rather seize of power by one side, which according to some experts can have advantages as well as disadvantages. Hence, the advantage of the regime change is that while Saakashvili having no obligation with old regime he could easily ‘clean house’¹⁴¹, whereas alarming aspect of the Revolution is that unlimited power seized in coup and authorized by 96 percent of the Georgia’s voters had raised well-grounded concerns among many that one day he too might turn to autocratic methods. Unfortunately, until now, these predictions proved to be plausible since immediately after the Revolution, Saakashvili started to centralize power in his hands.

When Saakashvili initially assumed power in January 2004, the term of current parliament, which lacked any legitimacy, was extended. However, being under strong influence from the President Saakashvili, the Georgian parliament amended the 1995 Constitution by substantially expanding the presidential power while further contracting parliamentary functions and its oversight power. Hence, the introduced sweeping changes in the Constitution further strengthened the President’s authority, entitling it with the power to initiate and veto legislation, to abolish or suspend any existing law, and dissolve parliament, if the latter will resists approving the budget or the Prime Ministerial candidate endorsed by the President.

As a result, Georgia’s political system marked by the absence of checks and balances, in other words, unequal distribution of power among legislative, executive and judicial branches for the advantage of the president, transformed into ‘super-presidential or absolute presidential’¹⁴² system. These factors provide the President and its ruling elite with enormous power to use the Constitution for their short-term advantages. The Parliament, at the same time, which independence and authority was compromised by these imbalances of power distribution coupled with fractured marginally represented opposition parties turned to be unable to make independent decisions and exercise oversight function on the executive branch.

¹⁴⁰ Michael McFaul, “Transition from Postcommunism”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, (2005), 17.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴² Marina Muskhelishvili and Gia Jorjoliani, “Georgia’s ongoing struggle for a better future continued: democracy promotion through civil society development”, *Democratization*, 16: 4, 682-708, (2009), 693.

Furthermore, amendments to the Constitution, namely the ratification of the 2004 law on the status of Adjara and the 2005 law on self-governance further compromised ‘the vertical and horizontal distribution of power’¹⁴³ in Georgia. Besides, the Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania’s death under dubious circumstances left executive power without strong political actor who could counterbalance Saakashvili. Besides, due to some arbitrary reforms, in judiciary system, which was already weakly institutionalized, fell under the President’s direct control. Despite some changes made in 2008, ‘revoking the president’s authority to hire and dismiss judges’¹⁴⁴ as well as illegalizing interference with judicial decisions, failed to persuade the public of its impartiality and fairness. It means that there is still a strong perception among the general public, politicians and independent experts that the system is heavily controlled by government using it as an instrument to selectively prosecute opponents yet ignore misdeeds by its political allies and close associates. These perceptions and concerns were substantiated by the emergence of political prisoners.

Next, I want to emphasize one of the major problem which characterizes Saakashvili’s government namely the fact that instead to foster cooperation and consensus based power sharing negotiations with its political opponents, the president and his administration often resorts to extremely aggressive and intolerant rhetoric, which as was the case with previous presidents Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, portrayed and labeled opponents as ‘public enemies’¹⁴⁵ or “Kremlin agents” striving to undermine Georgian state and its sovereignty. When the police forces violently cracked down opposition led demonstration in the downtown of Tbilisi in 2007 demanding his resignation for the , Saakashvili justified the disproportionate use of force by law enforcements as necessary step to avoid coup set by foreign country, especially indicating on Russia and blamed main opposition leaders as pawns of Russian security services.

While Saakashvili and his close associates made long boastful speeches about the meaningfulness of the Rose Revolution as the unprecedented democratic breakthrough in the post-Soviet sphere that could be successfully replicated to other countries as well, in the

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Annual Report, “Reform or Retouch? Georgia’s ‘New Wave of Democracy’”, *Transparency International Georgia*, (2009), 3.
www.transparency.ge (accessed May 30, 2010)

¹⁴⁵ Marina Muskhelishvili and Gia Jorjoliani, “Georgia’s ongoing struggle for a better future continued: democracy promotion through civil society development”, *Democratization*, 16: 4, 682-708, (2009), 693.

reality the state power in Georgia became centralized in the narrow circle of Saakashvili's close allies 'and was propagated by means of a party of power'¹⁴⁶, namely the United National Movement. In the parliamentary elections held on March 28, 2004, the National Movement-Democrats (later the United National Movement), headed by Saakashvili, won significant majority by receiving 65 percent of the vote and two thirds of seats in the Parliament of Georgia. The decisive victory of the United National Movement in the elections led to restoration of the old Soviet legacy of the 'party-state'¹⁴⁷, which is marked by centralized structure depending largely on 'the patronage of the presidency'¹⁴⁸. Thus, newly established system of governance did not much differ from Shevardnadze's 'party-power', which ruled Georgia more than decade. Besides, the decision making power was exclusively limited to the narrow circle of the leadership leading to arbitrary decisions, which were often ill-planned and without good sense of judgment. As result, such autocratic tendencies substantially weakened the successful state building prospects of Georgia.

Despite aforementioned problems characterizing Saakashvili's regime, by consolidating state power the state budget revenues increased substantially compared to previous state budget capacities, which can be ascribed to the better tax administration and more effective measures taken against corruption. Moreover, Saakashvili and his allies often attribute police reform as their greatest achievement, by claiming that the reform eliminated petty corruption, which existed for years especially in traffic police. In addition, improvements can be observed in energy and transport system, particularly 24 hour electricity, which during Shevardnadze period was almost non-existent, become available in many parts of country. However, many critics assert that these reforms and initiatives undertaken by the incumbent government carries just superficial character namely aimed only for their public relations rather than substantial reforms to really improve economic conditions and establish the rule of law in Georgia.

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 128.

¹⁴⁷ Marina Muskhelishvili and Gia Jorjoliani, "Georgia's ongoing struggle for a better future continued: democracy promotion through civil society development", *Democratization*, 16: 4, 682-708, (2009), 693.

¹⁴⁸ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 128.

3.1.2 Center- periphery relations, foreign policy and the August War

In contrast with Shevardnadze's relatively indifferent stance with respect to the center- region relations, by assuming power Saakashvili and his government made anti-corruption struggle, Georgia's integration to Euro-Atlantic structures, establishing good relations with Russia, and consolidation of the country as their top priorities. As a result, at the outset of his rule, due to the strong public support including within Adjara, Saakashvili managed to force out autocratic Adjarian leader, Aslan Abashidze, through non-violent demonstrations and protests pretty much resembling the Rose Revolution scenario. However, while encouraged by his successful accomplishments with respect to Shevardnadze and Abashidze, Saakashvili's attempts to bring the breakaway autonomous region of South Ossetia back to Georgia's jurisdiction proved to be unsuccessful.

Hence, with respect to South Ossetia, Saakashvili employed stick and carrot approach, implying to win support among local population including Ossetians largely with aim to undermine separatist government. Consequently, he began to deliver in South Ossetian villages agricultural products mostly fertilizers and apart from it offered to provide state pensions. However, he decided to close the Ergneti market, 'which functioned as a trading post between Russia and Georgia'¹⁴⁹ and which was located at the border of South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia, justifying this move that the market was the source of illegal activities mostly smuggling goods, besides Saakashvili claimed that the market negatively affected state budget revenues and tax control, plus Ergneti market was regarded as lucrative source for separatist regime of South Ossetia. However, the move turned to be quite unsuccessful especially with respect to build relationship and confidence between two conflicting sides, since the market served as also primary source of income for ordinary population inhabiting the area, thus by closure the Ergneti market Saakashvili failed to address economic needs of local population and as result small-scale armed conflict erupted in August 2004 leading to deaths of '17 Georgians and five Ossetians'¹⁵⁰, plus expulsion of many civilians from their homes.

¹⁴⁹ Bruno Coppieters, "Locating Georgian Security", In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 362.

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 128.

Thus, center-regional relationships under Saakashvili's rule entered into more confrontational paths that it was under Shevardnadze's regime, since despite the fact that government often declared on peaceful resolution of the Georgia's territorial integrity, on action government dramatically increased military budget (namely from 15 percent of GDP in 2003 to 25.8 percent in 2007) under the motive to restructure Georgian army to meet NATO standards, which at the one point was positive move since deteriorated army left by Shevardnadze's corrupted regime become more well equipped and better dressed, however gradually high rank politicians from the Georgian government and often President Saakashvili himself resorted to militaristic rhetoric sending aggressive signals to the separatist regimes and Russia as well that military option of the conflict resolution is not fully abandoned and can be still considered. Moreover, the government deliberately avoided 'to sign a guarantee on the non-use of force',¹⁵¹ which is significant prerequisite for the renewal of the negotiations. The situation between Georgia and Abkhazia escalated once again when, in July 2006, Saakashvili decided to eliminate the militia grouping controlling Upper Codori Gorge (East Abkhazia) for that reason the government send troops and took control over the area forcing militia members to flee. Shortly after the Saakashvili's administration made decision to relocate the Abkhazian government in exile to Upper Codori Gorge and establish there temporary administrative center. However the move was seen as the provocation by Abkhaz and Russian side leading to further severing relations with Sukhumi and Moscow.

As a result, tensions between Georgia and Russia mounted gradually, since Georgia's acute determination to integrate the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicted with the Russia's own security interests to stay in the region and maintain its influence over it. Besides, Georgia's drive toward the Euro-Atlantic institutions was seen by Russia and the separatist regimes move towards undermining their security in the area, since the expansion of the NATO and the EU in the region could bring change in balance of power not favorably as for Russia's as well as the separatist leaders' interests. However, further severing situation was also largely escalated by Saakashvili's and his close associates' embark on undiplomatic, ill-thought and arbitrary remarks as well as actions directed toward Russia and separatist leaders, which only served destructively for the further normalization of the relations between conflicting sides. Particularly, former Defense Minister of Georgia and once one of the closest

¹⁵¹ Jonathan Wheatley, "Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 128.

allies of Saakashvili vowed that they will bring South Ossetia back to Georgia by Christmas. Consequently, due to growing hostility Russia imposed an economic embargo on Georgia's goods and products plus expelled Georgian citizens from Russian territory in 2006.

Hostility between Georgia and Russia achieved its highest climax, when these countries engaged in open war over South Ossetia in 2008. 'As a consequence, altogether about 850 persons lost their lives, not to mention those who were wounded, who went missing, or the far more 100 000 civilians who fled their homes'¹⁵². However, the war showed remarkable shift in the conflict dynamics of Georgia, since contrasting to interethnic wars taking place in Georgia in early 1990s, the August War transformed into inter-state war in which Russia acted as direct part of the conflict rather the mediator. Whatever underlying implications of this war, one is clear that all sides were preparing for it and despite their calculations or miscalculations, for Georgia the price of the August War turn out to be extremely high, which apart from human suffering and loss, lost additional territories and put prospects of the negotiations on the conflict regulation to unforeseeable future.

3.2 New wave of protests and its failure to change regime

Growing public discontent precipitated by undemocratic actions of Saakashvili's regime particularly, absence of the rule of law and independent judiciary, plus increasing number of victims caused by disproportionate and violent use of police force transformed into mass civil protests with the demands for justice and democracy. However, Saakashvili's administration instead of initiating meaningful negotiations with opposing side used police units leading to violent crackdown of peaceful demonstrators followed with assault and closure of opposition TV channel. Moreover, snap presidential elections and shortly after parliamentary elections announced by Saakashvili with the aim to defuse crises, which resulted in victory in favor of Saakashvili and his ruling party, due to 'an alarming number irregularities, including multiple voting and voter intimidation'¹⁵³ not only escalated domestic discontent towards ruling

¹⁵² Report of Independent International Fact-Finding Mission: "*on the Conflict in Georgia*", Vol. I., (2009), 5. <http://www.ceiig.ch/Report.html> (accessed May 31, 2010)

¹⁵³ Annual Report, "Reform or Retouch? Georgia's 'New Wave of Democracy'", *Transparency International Georgia*, (2009), 5. www.transparency.ge (accessed May 30, 2010)

authorities, but also made some politicians in west concerned about Saakashvili's commitments to democracy, which led to removal of Georgia from the list of electoral democracies issued by the Freedom House.

Massive peaceful protests unleashed with new force in 2009, triggered by the August War between Georgia and Russia, which significantly damaged his reputation not only on the domestic level, but many in the west, accused him of precipitating the war. Two months long protest failed to change Saakashvili and his leadership, largely, as many experts contend, due to the absence of support from international democratic actors, non-governmental and international organizations, which role and involvement in the case of the Rose Revolution was crucial factor. However, still affected by substantial pressure from domestic as well as international level, Saakashvili announced the 'new wave of democracy' as effort to defuse crisis and somehow recover his tarnished reputation. Hence, the proposed package largely promised to increase of parliamentary power with respect to executive power through constitutional changes, provide more opportunities for opposition including its inclusion into decision making processes, improve electoral system, and guarantee for freedom media as well as the independence and impartiality of judiciary.

In conclusion, I want to sum up Saakashvilis's rule in its efforts to consolidate Georgia's fragile statehood. Hence, at the beginning the regime had achieved some improvements with regard to strengthening state power by slashing bureaucracy, curbing petty corruption and improving extractive capacity of state. However, disregarding democracy and instead embarking on authoritarian type of governance marked by the Soviet style arbitrary rule, absence of system ensuring checks and balances plus lack of institutionalization of the decision making largely precipitated the armed conflicts, radicalized domestic political climate, and thus failed to consolidate statehood successfully. Besides, center region relations under Saakashvili's regime, despite its efforts to promote civic concept of nationalism or citizenship, became extremely confrontational. Furthermore, by further severing relations with Russia, Georgia's state became even more vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of my thesis was to extend the theory of “the Fourth Wave” of transition in the Post-communist world and thus to find out to what extent and why Georgia, in contrast to Central and Eastern European countries, during its transition from communism and after that ended up with an unconsolidated regime burdened with interethnic conflicts and semi-dictatorial rules. Thus, in order to answer my research question, I conducted an analysis of Georgia’s political landscape since the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly the attempts, challenges and factors Georgia faced during the presidential rule of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili. In my attempt to accomplish my study I have applied as a case study on the state-building processes and conflict resolution in Georgia.

Aimed to answer my research question, I first tried to analyze Gamsakhurdia’s rule, then Shevardnadze’s regime and finally Saakashvili’s rule with respect to factors precipitating inter-ethnic wars, civil war, and inter-state war on the eve of Georgia’s independence and after. Besides, I attempted to examine the efforts made by governments of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili to consolidate statehood and promote democracy. Hence, as exploratory variables I choose state collapse, unconsolidated state, unsuccessful consolidation of state and democratization, whereas as explanatory variables I emphasized ethno-federalism, state building attempts, rise of nationalism, state and sub-state actors and foreign policies endorsed by presidents and roles of external actors, namely Russia, the United State, the European Union and NATO. Thus, in the case of Gamsakhurdia’s rule state collapse was largely attributed to the institutional legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism paving the way of creation of autonomous entities within Georgia, leading to separatism and ethnic confrontation. Besides, the soviet legacy of weak state building processes marked by underdeveloped institutional and political background precipitated the rise of nationalism among newly emerged elites as the only way to mobilize the nation. As a result, nationalistic upheavals in Georgia caused parallel nationalist-secessionists mobilization in its autonomous entities. The confrontation based on ethno national mobilization soon transformed into violent armed conflicts first started in South Ossetia and having a devastating effect on newly independent Georgia’s statehood.

Furthermore, I tried to explain the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts with the center-periphery relations theory, implying that the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in Georgia’s attempts to shift away from the center and establish an independent nation state

However, fearing to lose privileges given by the Soviet Union, the separatist entities within Georgia which had sufficient institutional framework preferred to secede from Georgia and to be directly subordinated to the Soviet Union as sovereign republics. Moreover, due to Gamsakhurdia's highly confrontational and authoritarian style of governance and unwillingness to cooperate with opponents dramatically radicalized the political climate in Georgia, which precipitated fragmentation of political groups leading to bitter animosity and rivalry between Georgian polities. As a consequence, Gamsakhurdia's many close allies defected from his government and joined opposition resistance, later contributing to the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia's government by violent military coup and ending with Gamsakhurdia's expulsion from Georgia. Plus his ultra nationalistic tendencies escalated ethnic confrontation leading to armed conflicts and fragmentation of Georgia. In addition, severed relations with Russia and other powerful international actors' lack of interest at that time towards Georgia also played a role in state collapse.

On the other hand, based on my analysis Shevardnadze's rule was marked by ambiguous and inconsistent state building policies leading to failed state. Although when Shevardnadze first assumed power, after the military coup which deposed Gamsakhurdia, he, with the assistance of Russia, reached a ceasefire agreement with the breakaway region South Ossetia in 1992. However, facing resurgent and belligerent ousted President Gamsakhurdia, who had mobilized armed groups in western Georgia, Shevardnadze fell in an ethnic nationalist trap and was supported by the military intervention in Abkhazia, in which Georgia was defeated and had detrimental consequences with respect to human suffering, destruction and the consolidation of statehood. Besides, with the support from Russia, Shevardnadze could defeat Gamsakhurdia and his supporting insurgents in western Georgia even though he lost a large part of Georgia's territory. However, he still managed to achieve progress towards state consolidation by introducing the new constitution in 1995. Furthermore, the state's monopoly of power strengthened under Shevardnadze's rule, which was the result of the marginalization and reintegration of the paramilitary groups into the newly formed armed forces. In addition, although Shevardnadze succeeded in shifting from ethnic nationalist discourse, meaning that ethnic minorities were no more regarded as "guests", he still failed to introduce in Georgia the civic concept of Georgian citizenship which would be a more inclusive and effective way for minorities' integration into Georgia's state. Instead, he chose old Soviet practice through which the regime of Shevardnadze incorporated high rank national minorities into his

‘patronage network’¹⁵⁴. Therefore, it can be concluded that mainly due to the failure of Shevardnadze’s government to exercise the ‘basic core functions of statehood’¹⁵⁵ such as the rule of law, security and provision of basic public goods, the incumbent ‘lost all trust and credibility’¹⁵⁶ in the public eye domestically as well as internationally. Moreover, the fraudulent parliamentary elections in 2003 further undermined his legitimacy, leading to people’s outrage and massive protests, which lasted for almost two weeks and culminated in the non-violent overthrow of Shevardnadze’s rule in November 2003. The event was labeled as the Rose Revolution, which brought the new government under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili in power.

Despite the fact that the Rose Revolution accelerated the pace of state building processes in Georgia, failure to get rid of “revolutionary syndrome” resulted in the unsuccessful consolidation of Georgia’s statehood marked by autocratic rule and Soviet style arbitrary decision making. Although at the beginning the regime had achieved some improvements with regard to strengthening state power by slashing bureaucracy, curbing petty corruption and improving extractive capacity of state, by disregarding democracy and instead embarking on authoritarian type of governance marked by the Soviet style arbitrary rule, absence of system ensuring checks and balances plus lack of institutionalization of the decision making largely precipitated the armed conflicts, radicalized the domestic political climate, and thus failed to successfully consolidate statehood. Besides, center region relations under Saakashvili’s regime, despite its efforts to promote civic concept of nationalism or citizenship, became extremely confrontational. Furthermore, by further severing relations with Russia, Georgia’s state became even more vulnerable.

Therefore, the attempts to implement the national project of Georgia during the rule of Gamsakhurdia were marked by extreme nationalism, precipitating exclusion and marginalization of minority groups, as well as radicalization of political discourse resulting in civil war and a coup d’etat. The extreme nationalistic discourse changed during Shevardnadze’s regime reaching a ceasefire agreement with South Ossetia, however failing to properly define and elaborate the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, besides the inability

¹⁵⁴ Bruno Coppieters, “Locating Georgian Security”, In *Statehood and Security*, ed. by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), 39-83, 362.

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan Wheatley, “Managing Ethnic Diversity in Georgia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back”, *Central Asian Survey*, 119-134, (2009), 127.

of the regime to elaborate civic concept of citizenship contributed to failure to integrate minorities into Georgia's statehood project. On the other hand, Saakashvli by resorting to more radical rhetoric vowed at his inauguration that he will devote all his term to restoring Georgia's territorial integrity, proposed new initiatives and policies. However, he failed to reach agreement with separatist entities, largely due to failure to create a proper constitutional framework based on federal arrangement guaranteeing the separation of power between Georgia and the autonomous entities.

With respect to international relations, it turned out that Georgian president's foreign policies differed, resulting in Georgia's inconsistent foreign policy strategies. During Gamsakhurdia's rule foreign policy priorities were not defined clearly, meaning the strategies were neither pro-Russia nor pro-Western leading to Georgia's isolation. However, Shevardnadze's regime tried to balance foreign policy by attempts to establish good relations with Russia as well as with western powers. The main priority for Shevardnadze on the other hand was the resolution of the conflict with Abkhazia. Initially, Shevardnadze took a more pro-Russian stance supporting Russia's position with respect to Chechnya. Besides, he allowed Russia to maintain its military bases in Georgia, and accepted membership of C.I.S. The move could be explained by his expectations that Russia would help him to find a solution for Abkhazia. However, from the end of 1990s Shevardnadze shifted his foreign policy preferences toward the west and declared the willingness to join NATO. In contrast, the foreign policy preferences of Saakashvili's rule were directed strictly to the west, which was appreciated by western actors. However, this severed relations with Russia and contributed to growing anti-Russian tendencies, with the relationship between Moscow and Tbilisi deteriorating dramatically.

¹⁵⁶ Martina Huber, "State-building in Georgia: Unfinished and at Risk?", *Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 'Clingendael'*, 1-86, (2004), 27.

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