



Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University  
Faculty of Law

# Journal of Law

№2, 2018



უნივერსიტეტის  
განმომცემლობა

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UDC(უბკ) 34(051.2)

ბ-216

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ISSN 2233-3746

## Geneva Conference (1904) in the Legal Context

*The present article is dedicated to the First Conference of Georgian revolutionaries held in Geneva in 1904, which represents an important stage of the two decades of struggle of Georgia and its people for independence. The assembly of emigrated Georgian politicians was not paid attention by legal specialists for decades. It is possible to say that the decisions taken by political parties in this conference significantly contributed to the future tactics of national forces in the beginning of the last century. Consequently, the main task of the article is to analyse the protocols of this less known and very interesting event in legal terms and present it to the wider society. Also, it should be underlined that the study of the conference materials once again demonstrates a high level of political and legal preparation of the leadership of Georgian society at the beginning of the last century. This was well illustrated when discussing the issues such as the principles of federal arrangement of state, rights of federation subjects, quality of human rights protection in highly developed countries, knowledge of the methods to gain and protect these rights, etc.*

**Key words:** *Geneva Conference (1904), independence, the Treaty of Georgiyevsk, Alliance Agreement, monarchical governance, autonomous unit, political party, the principles of federal arrangement of state, the rights of autonomous unit, republican form of governance, territorial autonomy, restoration of independence.*

### 1. Introduction

At any stage of public-political development, public experience shows that the history of the state is created by the people lived in this political unit and being created even today. For almost two centuries, the self-sacrificing struggle and labour of Georgian patriots were necessary to bring independence to Georgia again and also the right to determine its own future at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The First Conference of Georgian revolutionaries, held in Geneva, 1904, represents an important stage of the two decades of struggle for Georgia's independence. Legal specialists did not pay attention to the assembly of emigrant Georgian politicians for decades. It is possible to say that, in the beginning of the last century, the decisions taken by political parties in this very representative and well-organised event significantly contributed to the future tactics of national forces. Consequently, the main task of the research is to analyse the protocols of this less known and very interesting event in legal terms and also present it to the wider society.

The article consists of four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction and the fourth is conclusion. The second chapter of the work examines the legal status of Georgia under the Treaty of 1783 and legal consequences of its violation by the Russian Empire. The first part of the third chapter represents the reaction of Georgian society to loss of statehood of Georgia and dividing the principalities into Russian provinces (Kutaisi and Tbilisi provinces). The second part of the third chapter is based on

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\* Doctoral Student, Master's Degree in Law, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Law; Visiting Lecturer at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Georgian-American University.

the conference protocol, which demonstrated the vision of political parties participating in the conference and about the measures taken by Georgia to obtain the status of an autonomous unit within Russia. And finally, the third part of the third chapter is dedicated to the delegates' views on the conference, such as principles of federal arrangement of state and the rights of autonomous units in its composition. The results of the survey are presented in the fourth chapter of this article.

## 2. Legal Status of Georgia under the Treaty of 1783 and after Its Entry into Force

Despite the fact that Georgia had many strong enemies for millennia, it had always managed to maintain its statehood. The country still faced up to a difficult choice in the second half of the eighteenth century. Some strong Muslim states such as the Persian and Ottoman empires were fighting against each other for conquering Georgia. Russia was looking forward to a favourable moment to subordinate Georgia under maximally convenient conditions.

It was correctly mentioned by the Academician *N. Berdzenishvili* that Russia was dissatisfied with the strengthening of *King Erekle-II's* position in the region. Georgia had successes in its relationship with Muslim states and political unions to regulate the relationship, while Russia was trying hard to create artificial obstacles for Georgians from pursuing their goals.<sup>1</sup> It was not in Russia's interest to strengthen the independence of the Georgian state and its relations with Persia and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, Russia was interested in weakening the Georgian state as much as possible and keep it highly dependent on Russia's assistance.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, developments around Georgia in the last quarter of the eighteenth century were the result of the effective steps which Russia took in this direction. As it is known, *Erekle-II* received a written offer from the Russian government in 1782 to start negotiations and the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti was under Russian patronage. At the same time, in case of consent, they were also asking *King Erekle-II* to present an official request for protection.<sup>4</sup> As we have already mentioned above, the proposal was preceded by deliberate and long-term activities of the Russian authorities and *Erekle-II* was forced to connect the fate of his own kingdom to the Russian Empire because of active enemies within the country (peerages, *Paata and Alexander Batonishvili*) and without. Also, according to Russia, *King Erekle-II* should be the initiator of the Alliance Agreement.

An official request for accession to Russian patronage was sent by *Erekle-II* on 21 December 1782<sup>5</sup> and the Emperor of Russia satisfied the request. A very significant agreement was signed on 24 July 1783 in the fortress of Georgiyevsk. The name of the contract is known as the Treaty of Georgiyevsk and its legal nature was determined with 13 main and 4 separate articles.

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<sup>1</sup> *Berdzenishvili N.*, Essays of Georgian History, Vol. IV, Tbilisi, 1973, 169 (in Georgian).

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, negotiations made by *King Erekle-II* to Turkey's Sultan are notable. By that time, as Russia's ambassador in Turkey informed his superiors, Georgians were negotiating with Turkish authorities to get millions in credit. According to the Ambassador, in case of successful negotiations, the Georgian side was ready to refuse Russian alliance, *Surguladze I. I.*, History of Georgian State and Law, Tbilisi, 1968, 114 (in Georgian).

<sup>3</sup> *Metreveli V.*, History of Georgian Law, Tbilisi, 2004, 191 (in Georgian).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

<sup>5</sup> *Berdzenishvili N.*, Essays of Georgian History, Vol. IV, Tbilisi, 1973, 689 (in Georgian).

The alliance of agreement started with the preamble in which the emphasis was on the connection between the Russian Empire and the co-religionist Georgian state over centuries. Moreover, it included their good neighbourly relations and aims, which led to the conclusion of the agreement. The following are the contents of specific articles of the agreement:

According to the first article, Georgia refused to work independently with other countries and recognised Russia's supremacy. In the second article, the Emperor of Russia pledged to protect Georgia and help to return lost territories. By the virtue of the third article, the Emperor of Russia's permission was necessary for accession to the throne of Georgia.

The fourth article of the treaty was about foreign relations and Georgia was forbidden from establishing relations with other states without the agreement of the resident of Russia. Under the fifth article, Georgia and Russia would change their representatives to the king's throne. The sixth article of the treaty is very important, according to which the Russian emperor should not interfere with Georgia's internal affairs, *King Erekle-II* and his descendants would remain representing the royal throne and an enemy of Georgia would be the enemy of Russia. In the seventh article, *Erekle-II* took the responsibility of helping Russia with the army of Georgia if needed. Under the eighth and ninth articles, the *Catholicos of Kartli* would become a member of the Russian Synod and Georgian nobles were given equal privileges as Russian nobles. The tenth article was about the issue of free movement of Georgian nobility in Russia, the right to resettle there, prisoners' redemption and resettlement in Georgia. The eleventh article provided benefits for Georgian and Russian merchants in both countries. The twelfth article referred to the term of the contract, according to which the agreement would go on forever and amendments were permitted only by the agreement of the parties. According to the thirteenth article, the agreement was in force after six months from signing the treaty.<sup>6</sup>

As it was already mentioned, four separate articles were included together with the main articles of the Treaty of Georgiyevsk. Under the first article, the Emperor of Russia advised *Erekle-II* to have good relations with the King of Imereti for security purposes of the country and he offered himself as a conciliator. By the force of the second article, the Emperor of Russia's obligation was to have two full Russian battalions with four cannons in Georgia. Under the third article, it was defined that the head of the Caucasus Line had the obligation to act in agreement with *Erekle-II* during war. The final fourth article indicated that Russia had the obligation to protect Georgia with force during war.<sup>7</sup>

After reading the content of the articles, we are once again convinced of *King Erekle-II's* optimism that the agreement with one of the strongest countries in the world, along with a number of other good things, would bring peace to a long-suffering country, its inhabitants<sup>8</sup> and the royal throne would be retained for the successors of the king. All of this was directly underlined in the contract that the Emperor of Russia should not interfere in the internal affairs of the country and the royal throne must be inherited by the descendants of *Erekle-II*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Guruli V., Vardosanidze S., The Treaty of Georgiyevsk, Tbilisi, 1983, 20-21 (in Georgian).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 20-21, see: main article 2<sup>nd</sup> and separate articles 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 20-21, see: main articles 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>.

It is noteworthy that until today there are different views and opinions about the alliance agreement made between Russia and Georgia in 1783 and about its legal nature. For example, some scholars think that the legal document was not based on the principle of equality of the parties and Russia established a protectorate of Georgia with the help of the agreement.<sup>10</sup> Another school of thought discussed the treaty, and is still reviewing it, as “the Act of Protectorate and Vassal”.<sup>11</sup> An interesting opinion was expressed by Professor *W. Tsereteli* about the legal status of the Georgian state, which was based on the Treaty of Georgiyevsk. He believed that by virtue of the union agreement, Georgia would have remained a semi-independent state which would have full freedom of internal governance.<sup>12</sup> As for Academician *Ivane Javakhishvili*, he evaluated the Treaty of 1783 as a “friendly agreement on relationship and protection,” according to which the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti would become “sovereign but dependent”.<sup>13</sup>

The issue on which all parties agree with is that treaties like the Treaty of Georgiyevsk were not alien for the international law of feudal era. As a rule, by using this method, weak states were often under the protection of strong states<sup>14</sup> and, at the same time, they remained loyal to their own interests. In our case, Russia had strongly reinforced its positions in the region by Georgia’s subordination. The Russian Empire certainly could achieve the same with military power but, as Professor *Ivane Surguladze* correctly mentioned, the real aim was successfully disguised by Tsarism, using religious unity and the noble mission to help the people of the same religion. That was the main factor in the success of Russian diplomacy, “to resolve the problem without violence and accordingly without sacrifice”.<sup>15</sup> Finally, as academician *N. Berdzenishvili* noted, Russia has managed “to cross the Caucasian Mountains without war and achieve very favourable conditions to its south”.<sup>16</sup>

Another issue is the fulfilment of the hopes of the Georgian side, viz., getting rid of the aggression of Muslim states, regaining the lost territories and restore the united Georgian state.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, as time has shown, real intentions of the Russian Empire were far from fulfilling its obligations. The expectations of Georgia did not come true and its status at international level became more complicated. The aid that the Russian Empire promised to *King Erekle-II* was not fulfilled during his lifetime.<sup>18</sup>

On the contrary, despite many requests from Georgia, the Russian army left the kingdom exactly when *King Erekle-II*’s relationship with neighbouring Muslim political units was tense in 1787 because of the alliance agreement with Russia. With this action, Russia harshly violated the most important arti-

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<sup>10</sup> *Berdzenishvili N.*, Essays of Georgian History, Vol. IV, Tbilisi, 1973, 691-693 (in Georgian).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 196. See also: *Surguladze I. I.*, History of Georgian State and Law, Tbilisi, 1968, 116-118 (in Russian).

<sup>12</sup> *Sidamonidze U.*, Historiography of the Victory of Bourgeois-Democratic Movement and Socialist Revolution in Georgia, Tbilisi, 1970, 219 (in Georgian).

<sup>13</sup> *Berdzenishvili N.*, Essays of Georgian History, Vol. IV, Tbilisi, 1973, 692 (in Georgian). Also: *Javakhishvili I.*, Dependence between Russia and Georgia in the XVIII Century, Tbilisi, 1919, 25-32 (in Georgian).

<sup>14</sup> *Berdzenishvili N.*, Essays of Georgian History, Vol. IV, Tbilisi, 1973, 693 (in Georgian).

<sup>15</sup> *Surguladze I. I.*, History of Georgian State and Law, Tbilisi, 1968, 114 (in Russian).

<sup>16</sup> *Berdzenishvili N.*, Essays of Georgian History, Vol. IV, Tbilisi, 1973, 693 (in Georgian).

<sup>17</sup> *Metreveli V.*, History of Georgian Law, Tbilisi, 2004, 196 (in Georgian).

<sup>18</sup> Despite the fact that the Georgian side had been always informing the Russian commander in advance about possible threats.

cle from the agreement, viz., to protect its own ally with arms during war. It can be said that the next betrayal by Russia was in 1795, during the invasion of *Agha Mohammed Khan*, which was fateful for the country. Despite repeated requests, the Russian army trooped into Tbilisi only after a long delay when the capital of the country was burnt and looted by the Persians.

After the death of *Erekle-II*, one of the most important conditions in the 1783 agreement was also clearly violated, viz., governance by the ancient *Bagrationi* royal dynasty in Europe was finally over.<sup>19</sup> Based on the manifesto published on 18 June 1801, Georgia was (considered Kartli and Kakheti) “declared as a Russian province” and the state management functions had gone into the hands of Russian officials sent from Saint Petersburg.<sup>20</sup> Such changes naturally caused dissatisfaction among Georgian people, which in the first period of Russian governance became the reason for armed confrontation.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that representatives of the royal family, nobility and the relatively low level of social layers, such as citizens, craftsmen, peasants and others, participated in the confrontation. This once again proves the correctness of the opinion expressed in scholarly literature that these speeches are primarily important for considering its political, national libertarian nature.<sup>22</sup>

It is also correct to evaluate that such developments gave a push to activate political and legal opinions in Georgia in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is worthy of attention for us because frequently the views of Georgian nobility and public figures were not only about the independence of their country but also about its future political arrangements. As stated, it is especially interesting to know the ideas of the participants of the massive and well-organised conspiracy of 1832. Their future vision can be divided into three main directions, viz., restoration of feudal monarchy as before the Treaty of Georgiyevsk; introduction of constitutional monarchy; and establishing a republican model in Georgia, which was the most courageous and progressive view.

There is no doubt that one of the most visible public figures, a great Georgian educator and devoted patriot of his country, *Solomon Dodashvili* is among the supporters of the last viewpoint.

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<sup>19</sup> Taking this into consideration, it is hard to say that decision made by the Russian authorities was fair or neighbourly after the abolishment of the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti. Instead of Royal throne, *David Batonishvili* had a monthly remuneration of 500 roubles, *Queen Darejani* – 300 roubles; and other princes 100 roubles. The princes, who were offended by the decision of the Emperor of Russia were moved to Imereti, the Russian Emperor deprived their lands and declared them as a state property, *Surguladze I. I.*, History of Georgian State and Law, Tbilisi, 1968, 114 (in Russian).

<sup>20</sup> Later, the same fate was shared by the rest of the country: Kingdom of Imereti was merged into Russian Empire in 1810, Guria – in 1826, Samegrelo – in 1857, Svaneti – in 1858, and Abkhazia – in 1864, *Chkhetia Sh.*, Russian Governance System in Georgia (1840-1846 years), Moambe of Georgian State Museum, *Aphakhidze A.* (ed.), XII-B, Tbilisi, 1944, 111 (in Georgian).

<sup>21</sup> We mean rebellions: Kakheti — in 1802; Mtiuleti — in 1804; another rebellion in Kakheti in 1812, which spread out soon in Kartli and according to an official report 1,146 soldiers died in suppressing the rebellion; rebellion in Imereti — 1810, 1819-1820, etc., *Surguladze I. I.*, History of Georgian State and Law, Tbilisi, 1968, 221 (in Russian).

<sup>22</sup> *Chkhetia Sh.*, Russian Governance System in Georgia (1840-1846 years), Moambe of Georgian State Museum, *Aphakhidze A.* (ed.), XII-B, Tbilisi, 1944, 113 (in Georgian).



### 3. The Idea of Fighting for Autonomy in Georgia in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

#### 3.1. The Legacy of the Idea of Fighting for Autonomy – the Way from *Solomon Dodashvili* to the Geneva Conference

In spite of the fact that the conspiracy of 1832 was unsuccessful and its participants were brutally beaten by Tsarism;<sup>23</sup> it was the first time when the famous Georgian thinker and public figure *Solomon Dodashvili* (1805-1836) made a statement: “taking into consideration the existing reality, the prominent patriots of the country should abandon the unattainable dream of restoring the monarchy and apply their efforts to achieve national autonomy within the Russian Empire.”

With his statement, *Solomon Dodashvili* offered us his own view about Republican Georgia, considering the reality created in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a researcher of the life and thoughts of this greater thinker, Professor *J. Putkaraia* notes that, “according to the model of *Dodashvili*, Georgia would remain a part of Russia. However, the national-state rights characteristic to an autonomous entity must be granted to it. As a step forward, it should be assessed that, in *S. Dodashvili*’s autonomous republic, there was no place for monarchical governance and the country should refuse the institution of monarchy forever. However, the author found it possible that a representative of the royal family of *Bagrationi* held a high-ranking position in the Republic of Georgia and took part in the civil administration of the country, in its executive authorities, “the legislative and judicial authority should be gained by people.”<sup>24</sup>

Very briefly, this was the first speech containing the request for a republican form of governance in the history of Georgian political thought, which became the guide not only for *Solomon Dodashvili*’s contemporaries but also for generations of the National Movement in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup>

We consider that one specific expression of the above-mentioned is the First Conference of Georgian revolutionaries held in Geneva in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in particular during 1-7 April 1904. At first, 26 delegates were to attend the conference but finally 21 members attended it<sup>26</sup> where the future arrangement of the Georgian state was one of the key issues discussed. These dele-

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<sup>23</sup> In total, 145 people were arrested. After the trial, they were exiled to distant Russian provinces for various periods. *Solomon Dodashvili*, who was among them, was sentenced to permanent resettlement in Viatka. He was appointed as a penman. However, due to hard labour and after 18 months imprisonment in the barracks of Avlabari, his weakened body could not survive the north’s harsh conditions and died in 1836, at the age of 31, suffering tuberculosis. Unfortunately, his family members shared his hard fate. His juvenile daughter — *Ana Kobiashvili* died in Viatka in 1838. *Constantine*, the son of *Solomon Dodashvili*, died on his way back to homeland after his father’s death. In 1838, his wife *Elene Kobiashvili* died, too. Only *Ivane* survived from *Dodashvili*’s family. After a century and half of his death, grateful descendants reburied the devoted patriot’s remains in the Pantheon of Mtatsminda in 1994.

<sup>24</sup> *Putkaraia J.*, Political and Legal Views of Solomon Dodashvili, Tbilisi, 1997, 85 (in Georgian).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> *Shvelidze D.*, Originating Political Parties in Georgia – Federalists, Tbilisi, 1993, 127 (in Georgian).



gates “for reasons easily understandable”<sup>27</sup> are referred to only by pseudonyms instead of their real names in the conference protocols, published in 1905 as a book in Paris, by the famous Georgian public figure *George Dekanozishvili*;<sup>28</sup> however, it is not difficult to determine their party affiliation. They expressed the positions of the most popular political parties in Georgia at that time, namely, a group of social federalists who were united around the editorial board of Georgian language newspaper “Georgia”, which was published in Paris in 1904-1905; Georgian anarchists who were companions of *Varlam Cherkezishvili*; representatives of the Menshevik wing united around *Noe Zhordania*; members of Russian Social Democratic party; and Georgian socialist revolutionaries (revolutionists).<sup>29</sup>

The organisers of the conference intended to find out the following: “1. What the Georgian revolutionary factions were thinking about national issues; and 2. is it possible to unite them on the issue of national soil, in particular under the flag of Georgia’s autonomy.”<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the main task for them was to provide Georgian politicians both in Georgia and outside the country with the opportunity to judge the country’s future in a free environment, far away from “Okhranka” agents and Russian censors. It was an attempt to enable them to show their own vision on important issues such as the independence of Georgia, advantages and disadvantages of the autonomous and federal arrangement of the state, “the peasant question”, “workers question”, tactics of the revolution, the issue of dependence with different parties, etc.

As expected, one of the main issues was the matter of releasing Georgia from the Russian Empire. Moreover, Georgians were not alone in this aspiration. The delegate elected as the chairman of the conference with the pseudonym ‘Kartleli’ said, “every nation of the Russian Empire is fighting against Russia’s supremacy in order to gain freedom. The Russians are fighting, Poles and Armenians are also fighting and we, Georgian people, are fighting too.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the chairman expressed his hope that, despite the party affiliations of the delegates who arrived to participate in the conference, they will be able to agree with each other’s positions about specific issues “after a brotherly and friendly argument”.

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<sup>27</sup> Law enforcement authorities were searching for the majority of delegates in Russian Empire. Concerning pseudonyms, the list looks like as follows: Chairman – Kartleli (*Giorgi Dekanozishvili*), Secretaries: Tergeli (*Mikhako Tsereteli*) and *Tsangala*; delegates: *Deviani* (*Noe Jordania*), *Mtieli*, *Efremidze*, *Manaveli* (*Varlam Cherkezishvili*), *Vermitsanidze* (*Alexander Gabunia*), *Orgayan* (*Commando Gogelia*), *Gorgeladze*, *K. Anvili*, *Sabueli* (*Archil Jorjadze*), *Morbeladze*, *Liakhveli*, *Ckharjuladze*, *Rashadze*, *Faliani*, *Saba*, *Neidze*, *Tezreli*, etc; See: Protocols from the first conference of Georgian revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 257 (in Georgian); Also: *Shvelidze D.*, Originating Political Parties in Georgia – Federalists, Tbilisi, 1993, 127-129.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>29</sup> Defender of Peasant’s interests, heirs of Georgian *Khalkhosnebi*, socialist-revolutionaries’ involvement in the conference is directly indicated in the manual “Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries”, Paris, 1905, 38 (in Georgian); It should be noted that the members of this party were dramatically separate as social-democrats: “whose ideal is the state embraced by the central authority”, as anarchists “who are refusing all kind of government”, which considered to be prematurely early for Georgia. Consequently, they preferred “State with government” but “the government ought to be decentralised”, see: Protocols from the first Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 43 (in Georgian).

<sup>30</sup> *Shvelidze D.*, Originating Political Parties in Georgia – Federalists, Tbilisi, 1993, 127 (in Georgian).

<sup>31</sup> Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 11 (in Georgian).

Unfortunately, his expectations were not justified and the first one to refuse to make common decisions with anarchists and social federalists was *Noe Zhordania (Deviani)*, leader of social democrats. The vision of the conference organisers was unacceptable to him and his fellow party members and they left the event on the next day. The leader of the group explained the reason for leaving the conference: "... if we knew that we would have to make common resolutions, we would not have come because we cannot make common resolutions with the group of "Georgia" and anarchists. You want common resolutions. So, we are going."<sup>32</sup>

*Varlam Cherkezishvili*, who participated in the conference with the pseudonym *Manaveli*, was surprised by the narrow party vision of the Social Democrats and his attitude to *N. Zhordania* and his supporters was expressed as follows: "Why do you think that in this conference the enemies meet each other! I thought that we came here as Georgian friends, to make our Georgian cases. ...I came here not as a socialist but as a Georgian."<sup>33</sup>

Such approach to the case from *Varlam Cherkezishvili*, who was loyal to socialist issues, was conditioned by the situation in Georgia, which was alarming from his point of view. "I think if Russia's current policy lasted for another 20 years and if Russia also uses all opportunities it has, Georgian people will completely lose the soil on which its future should be built. Do not forget that we are a small nation, culturally unprepared for the economic and political struggle by which Russia is going to fight and it will not step back before achieving its goal."<sup>34</sup>

It can be said that, after Social Democrats left the meeting, the conference continued to work with this spirit and after long discussions about different topics, they made right decisions, the first of which was to find a way out from the difficult situation of the country.

### 3.2. The Vision of Representatives of Various Political Parties about the Measures to Gain Autonomy

Although all agreed to the necessity of taking effective measures to extricate the country from a difficult situation, there was a great discussion to develop a common position. It should be said that the statement "we must drive out Russians," which first appeared during the Revolt of Kakheti, 1832, was shared by all people. The vast majority of attendees agreed that it would be impossible to achieve this goal independently, without contacting other people who were enslaved by the Russian Empire.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 29, 37 (in Georgian). It should be noted that the conference adopted individual resolution about social-democrats, in which express sadness for the existence of factions between Georgians, "which refused to participate in the first free conference and consider Georgian people's urgent issues with the revolutionary group". See also: Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 75-76 (in Georgian).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 20-21. "Disobedient" patriots and social democrats as well as outside enemies brought no less harm to national liberation, which made the situation more complicated. They were representing as Bolsheviks, as Mensheviks, blindly following sedition of the Russian social democratic party: eliminate distinction between classes, workers movement consolidation and creation of united proletarian state. They were refusing importance of national issues. They preferred centralism than federal arrangement of the state. See also: Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 48-50, 54 (in Georgian).

Social revolutionaries stated in their reports: “We find it unnecessary and dangerous for Georgians to stand alone against the government of Russia.” In this case, the Russian government “would give the Georgian movement a national character and then it would be easier for them to destroy our nation. Because of this we need to act together with Russian parties against the common enemy’s government.”<sup>35</sup>

One of the delegates, *Vermitsanidze*, supported the necessity to fight for autonomy with other nations that were forced to merge into Russia.<sup>36</sup> According to his vision, Georgians had enough allies in such a fight. He said: “Every nation within the Russian border is in favour of national autonomy, ... and we should try to overthrow absolutism with the power of revolution together with others; then all the nations must gain autonomy and the unity of these autonomies must be federal.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition, it is noteworthy that the leaders of the political parties that were represented at the conference were trying to regain freedom and independence through diplomatic means. From their point of view, the best way to do so was the Treaty of Georgiyevsk, signed between Georgia and Russia in 1783. The vast majority of the parties in the country did not share the opinion that the treaty lost its power. On the contrary, they connected the idea of restoring Georgia’s political and territorial autonomy to the treaty – “our flag represents Georgia’s agreement with Russia”. The flag states: “Georgia is territorial autonomy.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that an interesting discussion was held between conference participants about methods of goal attainment. They agreed about the possibility to carry out terrorist acts against odious “public servants, factory or land owners in case of necessity to gain autonomy of the country. At the same time, they condemned the allocation policy of specific persons for such acts. For example: As the delegate *Tergeli* noted in his speech: “I think it is impossible to establish an executive committee for the execution of terrorist acts. Terror is an individual act and the revolutionary is able to sympathise with a terrorist whose personal matter was to carry out that opinion”, Protocols from the first conference of Georgian revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 208 (in Georgian). Delegate *Vermitsanidze* had the same opinion: “Terror – it is a personal matter that cannot be condemned by any revolutionary. And the governing of terror organization is not in the revolutionary sphere”, Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 209 (in Georgian); *Archil Jorjadze* was also against the appointment of special persons or the creation of special organs to carry out terrorist acts. He said: “A central organisation is not required to commit terrorist acts. But if bounded people endeavour to take arms to gain freedom, we are obliged to tell them that it is their holy duty”, Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 212 (in Georgian); *Varlam Cherkeshvili* had an interesting position about this issue. He was sharing the views of the delegates. He assumed that “appointment of individuals for committing murder is disastrous. Moreover, it kills enthusiasm”. With the deep faith of Georgian politicians, “People should not be encouraged to commit murder, but rather persuade peoples’ conscience and spread awareness that the overthrow of the government is possible only by force”, Transcripts from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 214-216 (in Georgian); According to delegate *Tergeli*, the basis of the attitude of Georgian patriots towards legal institutes (such as crime and punishment) must be sought in government and its legislation, according to the laws: “who must be punishers are punished and punishers are those who must be punished”, Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 143 (in Georgian).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>38</sup> *Chkhikvishvili G.*, National Democratic Party of Georgia in the Fight for Nation-State Independence, Tbilisi, 1992, 6-7 (in Georgian); See also: *Gvazava G.*, Our flag, Newspaper “Georgia”, № 51, 1917, 3-4 (in Georgian).

The discussion of *G. Gvazava* is very interesting regarding this issue. He justified Georgia's right historically and legally to restore independence. *G. Gvazava* clarified that, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia was politically united and with this status the country became a protectorate of Russia. The latter assumed the responsibility to return the lost territories to Georgia. Accordingly, Georgia's freedom and integrity of territory was determined by the treaty of 1783.<sup>39</sup>

*G. Gvazava* refers to the issue of restoration of Georgia's independence and its significance. He notes that the restoration of the statehood of Georgia was not an issue for Georgians alone, but it was an international issue.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to point out an opinion from one of the English newspapers, which indicates that "the basis for submitting complaints by Georgians was the 1783 treaty and also the fact that the last king of Georgia refused to rule royal government in 1801. In both cases, Russia agreed to respect Georgian local autonomy, Georgian language and Georgian church. However, these conditions were no longer protected".<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the article explains that the Georgian anarchist *Varlam Cherkezishvili* was trying to inform Europe about the fact that Georgia was not a conquered country without rights. It was forced to obey Russian rule, however Georgia had rights and was still a party to the contract. The rights were usurped by the stronger partner and then Georgia asked for help to restore those rights.<sup>42</sup>

*Varlam Cherkezishvili* tried to strengthen the position of the speakers with historical arguments. He addressed the participants of the conference: "Dear friends, do not forget that Russia did not conquer us, but we joined it with an agreement. We have the right to talk to the Russian government, as free states talk to each other. If the imperialists do not consider the fair demands of Georgian people, let us declare war on Russia, based on the norms of international law. Right now, we can set up an independent governance committee of Georgians... Can you see, what kind of rights do we have? Why should we reject our rights?"

When *W. Cherkezishvili* found out that the participants were surprised because of his statements, he tried to explain his words: "You are surprised that I am speaking about governance whereas I am an anarchist. But tell me, why should we refuse our rights without fighting? If we defend our rights, Europeans will never accuse us. They will say that we are the ones who were fighting against the country who invaded Georgia by force. People should not refuse their rights. We need to get new rights and not lose old ones. We can claim autonomy from Russia in accordance with existing rights."<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted that the example here is not the only one from *W. Cherkezishvili's* biography when he left the principles of anarchism in favour of the interest of his homeland. A similar case was repeated later when Georgian political circles discussed the issue of participation in the Russian Duma elections. As one of the leaders of social federalists and the first Minister of Education of independent

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<sup>39</sup> *Sidamonidze U.*, *Historiography of the Victory of Bourgeois-Democratic Movement and Socialist Revolution in Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1970, 214-215 (in Georgian).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

<sup>41</sup> *M. N.*, *Recollections of W. Tcherkesoff*, *Freedom*, 1925, December, 48.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>43</sup> *Sidamonidze U.*, *Historiography of the Victory of Bourgeois-Democratic Movement and Socialist Revolution in Georgia*, Tbilisi, 1970, 179 (in Georgian).

Georgia *George Laskhishvili* (1866-1936) recalled in his memoirs, “For all of us it was surprising that *W. Cherkezishvili* was against the refusal of participation in the Duma election. No one expected from him this kind of position and it was even amazing”. The reason for the surprise of the public was the fact that *Varlam Cherkezishvili*’s opinion about the parliament was well remembered by everyone. A Georgian anarchist explains that “the shameless institution like parliament was not created by bourgeoisie”. It was “the big trade market where people are selling, where they are hypocrites and deceiving the country”. Despite all this, as Mr. *George* noted, *W. Cherkezishvili* publicly urged social federalists to refuse the boycott of the elections. “You do not look at the parliament as I do, you believe in its political power, if I were you, the idea of boycott would seem insignificant. If you take into account the situation of our country, you should do your best. You should appear on the parliamentary tribunal and speak loudly about Georgia’s historical right. Let Europe and the whole country understand that the Georgian nation has a historical right to live in a free and independent country. Do not you know that your opponents – social democrats –are going from Georgia as the representatives of our country? And they will not say even one word about the historical right of our nation. If I were you, the idea of boycott would not be attractive for me even for a second” – a senior friend told his young compatriots.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, an experienced politician’s prophecy was fulfilled later. On 3 December 1912, at the session of the Russian Duma, when *Varlam Gelovani*, a deputy from Kutaisi province, demanded autonomy for Georgia, he was attacked by Georgian social democrat deputies. *Karlo Chkheidze*, *Akaki Chkhenkeli* and *Evgeni Gegechkori* traduced their compatriot that autonomy was needed for him and his companions as they wanted “chauvinism to flourish” in Georgia.<sup>45</sup> It is not surprising that after such a harsh assessment by Georgians, the Russian Duma did not discuss the issue of Georgia’s autonomy.

Unlike social democrats, the position of compatriots became the reason for compromise in the political beliefs of another Georgian anarchist *Komando Gogelia* (1878-1912). He told the participants of the conference, “I personally, do not have any favourite form of state governance. I am against any of them... So, how you can explain my being here? I will not fight for the constitution in Russia, in this I can see only the bondage of the monarchy and nothing else... We may be supportive of the federation of free societies and as long as all of these will happen, we must take part in every battle against the old governance. We are brothers to destroy the old form of governance...”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, as we become acquainted with the Geneva Conference materials, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a mere 14-15 years later, the anarchists known for the most anti-state views were more supportive of political forces fighting for Georgia’s autonomy than the Menshevik wing of the social democrats, led by independent Georgia.

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<sup>44</sup> *Laskhishvili G.*, Memoirs (1885-1915), Tbilisi, 1934, 254 (in Georgian).

<sup>45</sup> State Conference Session, 13 December 1912, Newspaper “Imereti”, № 75, 1912, 2-3 (in Georgian).

<sup>46</sup> Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 188 (in Georgian).



### 3.3. The Views of the Geneva Conference Participants about Autonomy Units and the Federal State

“The Georgian people, both historically and naturally, morally and otherwise represent one special nation whose overall development requires a political framework which will simplify to fulfil its aspirations” – Georgian students wrote in the letter sent to the Geneva Conference. Also, they indicated that from their point of view, only in case of obtaining autonomy it would be possible to develop Georgia in a good way.<sup>47</sup> With the examples of the delegates’ views, we will try to explain why there was such unanimity between the participants of the conference and their support for the issue of autonomy and federal arrangement of the state.

As a leader of the group within the newspaper “Georgia”, *A. Jorjadze* said, he and his companions did not endeavour to establish national autonomy in Georgia after the overthrow of the government. A form of state which will contribute to the country’s further cultural restructuring would be acceptable. “For this we join the other parties of Russia and other nation parties in Russia which are fighting against political centralism like us and all of whom are willing to grant all nations the status of autonomous republic which will be connected to each other federally instead of establishing one integral democratic republic. Today we are revolutionary autonomists and federalists” – said the leader of the Georgian national movement.<sup>48</sup>

As for the issue of the concept of autonomy for *A. Jorjadze*, we say it in his words that “it was a defined state institution, which made and passed the laws through parliament” and the existence of such an institution “was necessary for the protection and development of our national culture.”<sup>49</sup> Even though *A. Jorjadze* believed that the parliament could not provide “the realisation of the ideals of socialism”, it could still bring great prosperity for the public. “Sovereign of people”, recognition as human, freedom of speech, gathering, faith and press – all this is a big treasure which was created by developed humanity with the help of free political forms. We do not deny it, on the contrary we want all these things to establish in our country... national self-governance, ‘home rule’ will protect our national identity and create cultural conditions for its development...<sup>50</sup>

During the conference, *A. Jorjadze’s* views were shared and further expanded by the delegate *Vermitsanidze*. It is true that he did not elaborate about the country’s future models of autonomous and federal arrangements. However, he introduced to the delegates all the basic principles that will be the basis for such political formations. According to him: “1. A full democratic regime should be established with extensive local self-government; 2. All non-Georgian nationals who live in Georgia should be allowed to satisfy their cultural, civil and other needs without delay; 3. Faith should be regarded as a private affair, a matter of man’s conscience; 4. It is necessary to eliminate the conditions by which the revival and connection of free associations are hindered; and 5. It is necessary to remove conditions which restrict private and collective initiatives.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 45 (in Georgian).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 63-64.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 59.



The optimism that their plans were fulfilled was realistic for Georgians because the idea of national autonomy was popular not only in Georgia but also among other people who were conquered by Russia. We can read the same in the conference protocols as follows: “Poles do not want only autonomy, they want full independence!”... So, Poland is a great power to fight against the absolutism; Finland lost its autonomy yesterday and of course, will support this autonomy; In Ukraine (small Russia) the idea of autonomy is very common. Neither Armenians nor the other Caucasian nations will refuse this idea. As for Russia, the most powerful party in this country and its representative organ ‘Osvobozhdhane’ is hesitant on this question; Social-revolutionaries are obvious federalists; who was left in the camp of our opponents? – Russia’s social democracy, Russian nationalists and the Russian government. What can I say about social democrats and the latter is an even dangerous force. But nothing is invincible.”<sup>52</sup> Georgian patriots who were hopeful of the fact that national liberation movements were revived in Russia’s invaded nations, came to such conclusions at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As for the issue of coexistence of various nations and their autonomous units in the federal state, participants of the conference considered that this kind of unity was possible only in case of equality of federation subjects. It is noteworthy that for them declaring the idea of equality only at the legislative level did not mean that it would be realised in real life. To confirm this, they borrowed specific articles from the Austrian constitution, according to which: “Every race in the state was equal to the law. In particular, all of them had the right to protect their nationality and language. Equality of languages in the state schools, state institutions and public life was recognised by the state. In places where there were representatives of different races, public educational centres should function so that the representative of other countries must not be obliged to learn foreign languages. All races must receive education in their own languages, etc.”<sup>53</sup>

Despite such good laws, the national question was not less intensive in Austria than in Russia. The reason was the fact that the requirements of the law were not fulfilled. There, as well as in Russia, “one nation was dominant and benevolent”. Other nations should be satisfied with its “leftovers”, which was incompatible with the principles of autonomy and federalism in the view of Georgian politicians. “National self-esteem, pride – we read in the conference protocols – it is a fact and it should not be forgotten when they are talking about national question; they should know that no one will be satisfied with the leftovers of other.”<sup>54</sup>

Another great patriot of the last century, *Mikhako Tsereteli* (1878-1965), shared the common spirit of the participants of the Geneva Conference and believed that the federal arrangement of the country was “the essential form to create renewed humanity”<sup>55</sup> and focused on the necessity of equality and willingness to cooperate. Georgian politicians thought that it was not necessary to talk about federalism when you are told that your brotherhood does not help them, they are your enemies or the friends of your enemies or “when you are speaking about this issue “fellow-man” is looking at the for-

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<sup>52</sup> Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 74 (in Georgian).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *Tsereteli M.*, Seize State Force and Social Revolution, Tbilisi, 1906, 97 (in Georgian).

est while reading the gospel”.<sup>56</sup> It was deeply believed by Georgian politicians that federation and autonomy can be discussed only when there are full consent and mutual respect for the joint issues between the federation subjects.

It can be said that the same principles were based on a resolution adopted by the conference after a long discussion. According to it: “The conference recognises that the evolution of humankind is directed towards the unity and solidarity of the free nations; The autonomous nations federation is the best form for their consent and this is the best soil for social, mental and moral developments of these nations; This federation is also a reliable source of economic equality; and Despotism of Russia makes it impossible the implementation of these aspirations that our direct duty is to overthrow this despotism with a revolutionary struggle together with Russians and those people who are living in Russia and support this idea. Georgian Revolutionaries Conference rejects separatism, which is not considered to be the guarantee of solidarity and the social development between the nations and states. The best and the most necessary political goal for independent Georgia should be Autonomous Georgia, federally connected to other nations”.<sup>57</sup> Hereby, we can assert that this resolution, which was adopted at the 4 April session of Geneva Conference, was supported by 29 delegates. One delegate did not participate in the ballot.

#### **4. Conclusion**

It can be said that, through the 1904 Geneva Conference Protocols and the materials which were less-known to the society, we tried to represent the positive and negative parts of fighting for Georgia’s independence by Georgian people in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As in other countries, this process was not easy and faultless in Georgia. However, in the 1930’s the loyalty to a properly defined orientation can be considered as one of the main features of this movement.

We have studied and demonstrated this very representative assembly held by Georgian patriots in Europe in this respect. As expected, the vast majority of participants (except Mensheviks) once again confirmed the dedication of *Solomon Dodashvili* and loyalty to the autonomy supported by the best patriots of the country and determined the correct tactic for achieving the goal.

It should be underlined that the study of the conference materials once again demonstrated a high level of political and legal preparation of the leadership of Georgian society at the beginning of the last century. This was well illustrated when discussing the issues such as principles of federal arrangement of state, rights of federation subjects, quality of human rights protection in highly developed countries, knowledge of the methods to gain and protect these rights. All the above mentioned had a positive effect on the events taking place inside and outside the country and the correctness of the conclusions based on it. Here, we mean the clauses of the conference’s resolutions, viz., rejection of separatism, strengthening connections with Russians and other people living in Russia and establishment of an autonomous Georgia as a part of the federation of liberated nations through common effort.

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<sup>56</sup> *Tsereteli M. (Alarodieli)*, Guide Friends, Newspaper “Sakartvelos Moambe”, № 4, 1909, 7 (in Georgia). *M. Tsereteli*, not only Russia, but also the most popular project in the early twentieth century, the Subjects of the Caucasus Federation, was taking into consideration.

<sup>57</sup> Protocols from the First Conference of Georgian Revolutionaries, Paris, 1905, 183 (in Georgian).

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