

History

Russian Enclave in the Governance of Batumi (1919-1920)

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Abstract. The history of the Russian enclave established in the Batumi district between 1919 and 1920 stands as one of the most illustrative manifestations of the post-imperial crisis in the Caucasus. Created under the aegis of British military occupation – ostensibly intended to maintain order but in reality aimed at bolstering the White movement in Russia – the enclave was conceived as a geostrategic outpost of the “Russian world” in southwestern Georgia. The enclave's political objectives extended far beyond mere administrative control. At its core, it sought to prepare the foundation for the annexation of Batumi and its surrounding district into a restored Russian Empire, along its pre-1914 borders. These aspirations were rooted in the anticipation of a decisive victory by General Denikin’s White movement. A comprehensive ideological campaign was launched, including the dissemination of Russian nationalist propaganda through the local press and the systematic exclusion of Georgians from all levels of administrative governance. Georgia’s patient but firm diplomatic resistance, coupled with domestic political cohesion and widespread public disapproval of foreign-imposed governance, dealt a critical blow to the Russian project. The collapse of Denikin’s campaign in the latter half of 1920, along with a shift in international priorities, eroded the remaining support structures of the enclave. © 2025 *Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.*

Keywords: Batumi district, administrative governance, Russian enclave, colonial policy

Introduction

The work concerns the place and role of the Russian enclave operating in the Batumi region during the British occupation regime in the Democratic Republic of Georgia, specifically in the structure and politics of the city and region's governance.

With British backing, this enclave took on a distinctly anti-Georgian character.

Immediately after the end of World War I, the struggle between the great powers for the control of southwestern Georgia, especially the Batumi region, intensified. The defeat of the German bloc

countries in World War I eliminated the possibility of Ottoman domination in this region.

The strengthening of this process was significantly impeded by the political upheavals that developed in Russia itself, culminating in the October Revolution of 1917. These events fundamentally undermined the state structure of Russia and led to severe political consequences in the regions, including a power vacuum and the reactivation of various anti-Georgian forces, which was directly reflected in the ongoing geopolitics (Kazemzadeh, 2020).

Great Britain took advantage of this and actively worked to establish itself in this area, prioritising the use of the Russian element. Accordingly, the goal of our research is to study the governance structure of the city of Batumi and Batumi District Governing Council, created with British support, and the activities of representatives of the Russian enclave in it, which also carried the content of Russian colonial policy.

Particular attention is given to the formation city and district government structures, as well as the chauvinistic activities of the Russian government enclave in Batumi district, against the backdrop of the Russification personnel policy encouraged by the British. The study revealed that the Russian enclave operating in the Batumi region, along with the city and region governing council, which was established with British support, did everything in their power to separate the Batumi region from Georgia, but ultimately failed.

Method

This study is based on the principles of historicism and logical analysis, which form the core of scientific methodology. The material was selected and analyzed using a methodology proven in science. Research methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, and reconciliation were used.

Research Results

A relatively complete and primary-source-based scientific work has been developed on the issue of the formation and functioning of the Russian enclave in the Batumi region. This topic has remained systematically unexplored in the context of both regional politics and the assessment of imperial influence. The paper analyzes the main strategic goals of the Russian enclave's activities, which were of a clearly anti-Georgian and anti-national nature. It is confirmed that the enclave's policy was not limited to the establishment of administrative mechanisms, but also included ethnic marginalization, exclusion of the local population, and structural strengthening of the colonial space.

Significant emphasis was placed on the dynamics of relations between the British occupation administration and the Russian enclave. The study showed that both sides had some common interests when it came to the strategic status of the Batumi region in the Black Sea region. At the same time, the contradictions between them were also revealed, which stemmed from both differences in geopolitical goals and contrasting governance approaches.

Discussion

The formation of the Russian enclave in Batumi District was facilitated by the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in Georgia starting in the 1880s. Batumi District initially became part of the Kutaisi governorate, and from 1903, it was separated as a separate administrative unit with the status of Batumi District and was directly or informally subordinated to the imperial authorities (Zosidze, 1995). The change in the administrative-territorial governance status of Batumi District contributed to the strengthening of Russian colonial policy and, consequently, the formation of a Russian enclave. Russian colonial policy reached its full power at the beginning of the 20th century.

In the individual instructions of the Governor-General of Batumi District and the chancellery of the Viceroy of the Caucasus, there are numerous specific instructions on how the colonial policy should have been gradually established in Batumi and its surroundings – artificially created difficulties for the local population, selection and appropriation of colonization dacha lands, planned settlement of Russian and other nationalities, etc. (Central State Historical Archive of Georgia (TSGIAG). (n.d.). Fund №12, Inventory 1, Cases 156; 2947; Fund № 416, Inventory 3, Case 163).

The first applications of this policy were compact settlements of Russian settlers: “Smekalovka” (in honour of Smekalov, the Military Governor of Batumi). In the town outskirts of Bartskhana, the so-called “Kholodnaya Sloboda”, settlers in the Chakvi princely estate (about 100 families), “Aleksievka” at the mouth of the Chorokhi River, “Komarovka” near Kobuleti (in honour of the first Governor-General of Batumi District), “Romanovka” (this name is associated with Governor Romanovsky-Romanenko). As a result of such colonial policy, although the population of Batumi increased progressively, this happened at the expense of a threefold reduction in the percentage ratio of Georgians (Turmanidze, 2009). Ultimately, through such policies, the imperial authorities created a viable Russian enclave in Batumi District, which maintained its nature even under different political and legal regimes. The accelerated development of events received a particular impetus from the transition to a new phase of relations between Soviet Russia and Germany in early 1918, which was influenced by the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations. This dynamism was particularly evident in the Batumi region, where the British occupation regime had been in operation since January 1919 (Zosidze et. Al., 2018).

Based on the Mudros Armistice of 30th October 1918, the British demanded that the Turks leave the Batumi, Kars and Ardahan regions on November 11. The first real step by the British to occupy

Batumi was taken on 1st December 1918, when the British cruiser “Liverpool” and two torpedoes entered the port of Batumi. On 25th December 1918, Brigadier General William James Norman Cook-Collis was appointed as the military governor of Batumi. On 30th December, four giant gray steel transports entered the port of Batumi, from which about 15,000 military personnel disembarked under the command of General Forester Walker.

The latter settled in Batumi in the former council building that previously housed the governor appointed by the Ottoman Empire. (Sari, 2014; Sürmeli, 2001). In fact, from January 1919 to July 1920, Batumi and its district came under the control of the occupying authorities. The occupying authority, the English General Forester Walker, began to deal with an extremely highly diverse political spectrum. It should also be noted that Great Britain unconditionally supported the White Guard movement in Russia at that stage. The British had their plan, which did not consider Georgian national interests at all.

The Russian White Guard struggle aimed to defeat Lenin's Bolshevik “plague” (Black Death – N.Z.) and restore the Russian Empire within its pre-1914 war borders. In this regard, the meeting of representatives of the Russian National Council with General Walker is noteworthy. This council was strongly represented in the Transcaucasus, especially in Batumi. Its active members were mainly represented by Russia's Constitutional Democratic Party (“Cadets”) and high-ranking Russian military officials.

An English general met Maslov, Anisimov and Saranchev, the leading nuclear trio of the council. They presented their vision of the future development of Batumi and the Batumi District to the English. This extremely interesting document was based on a vivid description of the previous merits of the Russian Empire and directly demanded the transfer of control over the Batumi District to them, to which the response was reasonably negative.

Against the backdrop of subsequent events, when F. Walker received direct directives from General Milne, Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in the Near East, it was decided to grant preferential rights to the Russian National Council in Batumi. The Cadet Prilidian Maslov led this council. This person embodied a clever, educated and highly chauvinistic Russian politician. In general, through the active efforts of this council, exacerbated chauvinism and reactionary nationalism was established in the Russian enclave of the Batumi region. The central thesis, woven throughout the idea's leitmotif, was that the Transcaucasus, like the entire Caucasus, was an organic part of Russian territory, and Russian soldiers' blood was shed there (Andersen, 2020).

The main point of the conversation between F. Walker and P. Maslov was that the Russians were granted the right to establish a council for the administration of the district and city composed of representatives from various nationalities, with the Russian ethnic element being predominant. According to the English general, this expressed their support for General Anton Ivanovich Denikin, in whose ultimate victory they believed. It should also be noted here that the attitude towards the Russian White Guard movement and one of its leaders, A. Denikin, was ambiguous in Great Britain. As for the Russian National Council operating in Batumi, it had a uniform attitude towards the above-mentioned issue. This was reflected in the minutes of the council meeting.

One of its points directly stated that in case of Denikin's Dobro Army victory or "Volunteer Army", the Russian National Council of Batumi and its district would intensify its activities to unite the district and all of Georgia with Russia (Maslov, 2018).

The position of Great Britain on Transcaucasian issues at that time was clearly outlined in Forester Walker's concluding speech (Tsukhishvili, 1995). He directly told the visiting Russians that "our common goal is to overthrow Bolshevism in Russia

and restore normal government and life. Due to the relative weakness of the 'Volunteer Army', we are holding the Caucasus to ensure order and preserve this region for Russia. In particular, I decided to restore Russian authority in Batumi and give preferential influence to the Russian element. But are you sure a purely Russian government will enjoy the necessary authority? Will it not remain suspended in the air, or disconnected from the majority of the population, which is so diverse in its composition..." And he concluded his speech by saying, "... We all welcome General Denikin, whom we fully support and whose final victory we believe in" (Central State Historical Archive of Georgia (TSGIAG), Fund №12, ins. 1, c.2947).

Then General Walker introduced Maslov to a tentative scheme with the likely distribution of seats in the future governing council. This British proposal was discussed the same day at a meeting of the Russian National Council. It became the subject of heated debate. Some members of the council could not hide their outrage at the treachery of the British. In their opinion, cooperation in this form lowered Russia's prestige. They leaned towards rejecting Walker's proposal. In the end, S. Anisimov's view prevailed. In his opinion, if the Russians refused, the British would invite Georgians to power, which would be a complete catastrophe for the Russians. Therefore, the very next day, Maslov officially announced his consent and accepted the British's offer. In this regard, the conversation between P. Maslov and Cook Collis, the Governor General of the city of Batumi and the Batumi region, is noteworthy. Cook Collis promised him full support. After the usual courtesies, Cook-Collis stated that the entire district was entirely at his disposal. They should not shy away from the form, as there would be a purely Russian administration in Batumi. Maslov created a governing council, taking on the leadership and relations with the British himself. Anisimov managed provisions, finances, and customs affairs and was also Maslov's deputy. Z. Khitorov-Bestavishvili mana-

ged agricultural affairs, Mgaloblishvili – education and schools, P. Simeonidi – the judicial department, I. Gendler – the post office, L. Koribud-Dashkevich – the economic and technical part, I. Piloyan – the seaport and customs. Omer Agha took an undefined position without a portfolio, entrusted with the so-called service of fighting against the lack of culture (Maslov, 2018).

Regarding the issues and timeline for withdrawing Ottoman military units, armaments and administration from the regions of Batumi, Kars and Ardahan, the commander of the Ottoman 9th Army Yakup Şevki Pasha and the commander of British military forces in Batumi, General Forester Walker, met each other in Kars on January 7. General Walker demanded from Yakup Şevki Pasha the evacuation of the aforementioned three sanjaks by January 25. The evacuation process was to take place under British supervision. From the Turkish army command's side, the evacuation of Turkish military units from the Batumi district was to be completed by February 1. For a certain period, those military personnel who could not join the leading force in time due to distance from their military units and a particular group of demobilized soldiers, would have to remain temporarily remain in Batumi temporarily. By January 26, the headquarters of the Ottoman 5th Division had already been transferred to Trabzon (Sürmeli, 2001).

Soon, the dismantling of the administrative and legal structures established by the six-month Ottoman rule in the Batumi region commenced. They were gradually supplanted by a governance model tailored to the needs of the British occupation regime. In the new government, considerable significance was afforded to representatives of the Russian enclave, who operated in both the administrative and law enforcement sectors, as well as in the information sector. This trend distinctly mirrored the continuation of the imperial strategy of advancing British interests (Zosidze et. al., 2022).

In a short time, the complete dismantling of Ottoman rule, and the Russian Empire's tricolour

flag once again flew over the Batumi chancellery. Thus, the Council for the Administration of the City of Batumi and its District was created, directly subordinated to the Military Governor of Batumi District, James Norman Cook-Collis. Maslov's activities took place against the background of a sharp Russification personnel policy. In the shortest time, the bureaucracy in city and district administrative structures was replaced by 70-80% Russian personnel. The city militia was staffed with Russian military officers (Essays on the History of Southwestern Georgia, 2008).

As Maslov notes, only one member of the Council did not live up to expectations. This was Mgaloblishvili. He was of Russophile origin, but under the influence of his Georgian wife and surrounding circle, he gradually became a "Georgian eye." Not only in Batumi District but throughout Transcaucasia, the general aspiration of the existing Russian enclave was expressed through tireless, uncompromising work and struggle to achieve the primary goal. This was to be expressed as a united Russia, not Bolshevik Russia. The most active part of the Russian enclave was mobilized in Batumi District and city. With Maslov's active position, a commission to determine the total damage of those affected by the war (mainly by the Turks) was created, chaired by R.S. Termen, who had returned from Ekaterinodar (currently the city of Krasnodar in the Russian Federation) (Maslov, 2018).

It was very popular among the population, and due to its activities, some compensation was received from the Turks. Additionally, of a life and political necessity that emerged to restore the Batumi pre-war court, which consisted of three-chamber members and a chairman. The Russians paid special attention to the organization of the militia. They long discussed whether to call it militia or police. They deliberated on the criteria for personnel selection and the expediency of distributing positions. Staffing schedules were also established 150 defenders in the town of Batumi,

and 350 in the rest of the district. The number of border guards was also set at 350.

The border guards were mainly selected from Russian-speaking officers and soldiers and were stationed along the administrative borders separating the rest of Georgia's territories. Armenians who had proven their loyalty to the Russians were also accepted into the militia. Governor Cook Collis left only small garrisons at the main – locations: Artvin, Artanuji, Borchka, and Kobuleti. One of the most challenging issues was the food supply for the city and district. In his memoirs, Maslov recounts the organization of the distribution of a large batch (1000 tons) of American white flour, which was considerable for that time. 20 public bakeries were set up in Batumi, from which the population received unlimited baked bread at a fixed price – 1.5 Kerensky Russian roubles per pound (Jones, Stephen., 2012)

Maslov's administration paid special attention to rehabilitating the Chakvi princely estates. The administration was fully restored, mainly with Russian-speaking specialists. The tea and tangerines grown here were sent to Ekaterinodar, where Denikin's White Movement headquarters was located, to be exchanged for grain in the North Caucasus. The Russians' task was greatly facilitated by the fact that they were under the protection of English bayonets. By March, however, the internal order was relatively well-maintained by the militia they had created.

Conclusion

P. Maslov's patched-up government body was called the "Council of Nine". In addition to forming administrative structures, another task was to intensify relations with General Anton Ivanovich Denikin. These relations were conducted in a multi-faceted format, with a few key aspects highlighted below:

1. General Porokhonsky was sent from Denikin's headquarters in Ekaterinodar to Batumi, considered an official of the Russian White Guard

government. A list of top-priority tasks was also defined particularly material military assistance for the Volunteer Army. The military and material goods that still abundantly remained in Batumi were inventoried and sent to Yekaterinodar (the citadel of Denikin's military headquarters). As for oil and oil products, they were not considered for a simple reason... Before the British occupation forces arrived, and the reservoirs of the Batumi oil base were emptied entirely. The government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia declared its claims on the remaining military equipment in the region and addressed a corresponding note to General Cook Collis, but the latter did not respond at all.

2. Various of types information, primarily of military and strategic significance, were regularly sent from Batumi to Denikin's headquarters in Yekaterinodar. General P. Termen's regular military reports deserve special attention. General Termen and the leadership core of the Russian enclave were frightened by the population's clearly expressed anti-Russian sentiment and assessed this as a Georgian chauvinistic outburst.

3. The Denikinites tried to replenish the front with human resources from this area. The main interest in this regard was focused on Georgia. Batumi was chosen as the gathering place for volunteers to be sent to the Russian front. From a research perspective, the activity of General Natiev (Natishvili), who was of Georgian origin but Russified in consciousness, is highly noteworthy. In a report sent to Denikin's headquarters, he refers to the Georgian government as chauvinistic. In his opinion, it was possible to recruit up to 3,000 volunteer warriors in the Batumi region for the so-called "native regiment". This general's cunning went even further... He asked the military authorities in Yekaterinodar for funds to win over Georgian officers and to conduct agitation and propaganda among the population. He considered it urgent to create Georgian, Armenian, and Tatar "native regiments" based on the entire Transcaucasia. These regiments would undergo initial trai-

ning in the surroundings of Batumi and Kobuleti... Other convenient locations were not ruled out. He elaborated his vision in this direction in detail and precisely in a letter sent to Major General Trukhachev, a representative of the Ekaterinodar headquarters. The Ekaterinodar government considered it expedient to support General Natiev, financially and morally fully. A document signed by General Dragomirov remains, detailing the allocation of 1.5 million roubles to General Natiev. However, General Natiev's "hurrah-patriotic" attempts failed. He was shot dead along with his adjutant Filipov on the boulevard of Batumi.

4. General Romanovsky's report to General Denikin about Batumi outlined the main socio-economic priorities that would be given fundamental importance in terms of further development of various types of economic cooperation between the Ekaterinodar government and Batumi District. The Division of Provisions of Batumi subordinated to the high command was also envisaged. The restoration of sea transport traffic and the reactivation of postal, telegraph, and banking-financial activities were planned for the near future.

5. On the ideological front, it was considered expedient to finance the extremely chauvinistic Russian-language newspaper "Nash Krai" published in Batumi. Its predecessor was also the

Russian-language newspaper "Yuzhny Krai", which that had circulated in Batumi until 1918. The aforementioned newspaper was to be published in several languages. Special attention was to be paid to ideological work with the Muslim population living in the district.

6. Romanovsky's 14-point report highlighted cooperation with the British occupation authorities separately. Relations between the parties were to be regulated. According to the agreement, the British should not have interfered with the Denikinites and the Russian enclave of the district (Zosidze, 1995). General Romanovsky presented the aforementioned 14-point report directly to Anton Denikin, who considered all the demands as urgent necessities and top-priority tasks to be implemented.

The Batumi municipal elections held on February 29, 1919, clearly showed that Batumi was an integral part of Georgia (Saralidze, 2023). Georgian candidates won the large majority of the electable seats. On the fronts of the ongoing civil war in Russia, the Denikinites suffered serious defeats, which practically thwarted the realization of plans for the Russian enclave in Batumi and throughout Georgia in the second half of 1920. The Russian enclave in the Batumi region suffered a complete collapse.

ისტორია

რუსული ანკლავი ბათუმის მმართველობაში (1919-1920)

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საქართველოს ტექნიკური უნივერსიტეტი, პოლიტიკისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების დეპარტამენტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

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1919-1920 წლებში ბათუმის ოლქში ჩამოყალიბებული რუსული ანკლავი წარმოადგენს პოსტ-იმპერიული სივრცის კრიზისის ერთ-ერთ ყველაზე ნათელ მაგალითს კავკასიაში. ანკლავი შეიქმნა დიდი ბრიტანეთის მიერ მხარდაჭერილი დროებითი ოკუპაციის პირობებში, ფორმალურად წესრიგის დასაცავად, მაგრამ რეალურად – დენიკინის თეთრგვარდიული მოძრაობის დასახმარებლად. ინგლისელი გენერლის, ფორესტერ უოკერის, და რუსეთის ნაციონალისტური ელიტის შეთანხმებით, ბათუმში ჩამოყალიბდა ანტიქართული, შოვინისტური ხასიათის მქონე ადმინისტრაცია. მისი მმართველობითი სისტემა ეყრდნობოდა რუს ოფიცრებსა და მცირე ეთნიკურ ჯგუფებს. გატარებული პოლიტიკა მოიცავდა ქართული პოლიტიკური ელიტის განდევნას, რეპრესიულ სტრუქტურათა შექმნასა და რუსულენოვანი პროპაგანდის გავრცელებას. 1919 წლის მუნიციპალურ არჩევნებში ქართველთა გამარჯვებამ ანკლავის ლეგიტიმაცია შეარყია. მიუხედავად ინგლისური მხარდაჭერისა, ანკლავი ვერ გახდა მდგრადი პოლიტიკური ან სოციალური ძალა. დენიკინის მარცხმა, საერთაშორისო ინტერესთა გადანაცვლებამ და ადგილობრივი მოსახლეობის ერთგულებამ საქართველოს სახელმწიფოებრივი იდეისადმი ანკლავი იზოლაციაში მოაქცია. მისი პოლიტიკური კრაზი გამოხატავდა იმპერიული იდეოლოგიის უკანდახევას რეგიონის ეთნონაციონალური თვითშეგნების წინაშე.

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