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RUSSIAN EXPANSION IN THE CAUCASUS AND GEORGIA

The Expansion of Russia in the Caucasus and Georgia project offers the readers collection of scientific-popular articles which aims to cover the Georgian-Russian relations of the XVIII-XX centuries in a manner different from the widely propagated perspective of the official Russia.

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THE GEORGIAN PRESS OF 1918-1921 AND BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA



A number of newspapers were published in Georgia during the independence of the Republic in 1918-1921. Various types of press were created, some of which focused on themes of dissidence or sports, and some which were artistic or professional, literary, entertaining, pedagogical, or something other. The story of some of the newspapers – *Sakartvelo* (Georgia)¹, *Sakhalkho Sakme* (Public Affairs),² *Ertoba* (Unity)³ – began before the declaration of independence of Georgia, while others, such as *Sakartvelos Respublika* (Republic of Georgia)⁴ appeared after the restoration of the country's independence.

The Georgian press of that time was a chronicler of the independent Republic of Georgia of 1918-1921. There was virtually no event that did not get reported in the newspapers then, from the day Georgia declared independence until 1921, when independent newspapers ceased to exist along with the occupation of Georgia by Bolshevik Russia.

It can be said that the independence of Georgia in 1918 was born in front of the newspapers *Sakartvelo*, *Sakhalkho Sakme*, and *Ertoba*. However, not all Georgian press met the opportunity of independence with the same enthusiasm. The idea of Georgia's independence was most actively supported by the national-democratic *Sakartvelo*. Eight days before the declaration of independence, on May 18, 1918, while discussing the difficult situation in the Transcaucasian Republic, the newspaper *Sakartvelo* wrote:

“Complete and immediate independence of Georgia is still the only way of salvation, to help it overcome the extreme situation.”⁵

¹ The newspaper *Sakartvelo* (Georgia) was published in 1915-1921.

² The newspaper *Sakhalkho Sakme* (Public Affairs) was published in 1917-1921.

³ The newspaper *Ertoba* (Unity) was published in 1917-1921.

⁴ The newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika* (Republic of Georgia) was published in 1918-1921.

⁵ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №94, May 18, 1918.

With the approach of May 26, the message of *Sakartvelo* became even clearer. On May 24, 1918, in an article titled "The Last Resort," the newspaper wrote:

"Of course, no political step can completely change the current situation in our country. But the Georgian nation and its leaders must take any measure necessary that will bare even a slight alleviation of the situation.

"Secession from Transcaucasia and a declaration of independence should be considered as such a measure for Georgia."⁶

In contrast to *Sakartvelo*, instead of openly calling for Georgia's independence, the pages of the newspaper *Ertoba* in late May 1918 focused on the need to save the Transcaucasian Republic. Speaking about the threat posed by the Ottomans, on May 17, 1918, *Ertoba* noted:

The Republic, "our new freedom, is threatened by the Ottomans aiming to conquer a young independent Transcaucasia, it is advancing slowly but surely."

"We must support the government in every way. We need healthy men to take up arms and stand everywhere, resisting the enemy if they invade our country. There is no time for hesitation."⁷

Articles with similar content on the pages of *Ertoba*, which was more concerned with the difficult situation in the Transcaucasian Republic than the possibility of Georgia's declaration of independence, appeared repeatedly in the following days, especially in the days before May 26, and even on May 26 itself:

"Transcaucasian democracy is suffering a bitter fate. It is still the ruler of the fate of all people, but it can achieve these aspirations not according to its own desires and decisions but by the dictates and orders of outside forces. And these forces are the imperialist countries that want to use Transcaucasia for their own interests."⁸

It is noteworthy that in the very first days of independence, only the newspaper *Sakartvelo* devoted ex-



tensive articles to the fact of the restoration of Georgian independence, while other newspapers limited themselves to general information. For example, on the pages of *Sakartvelo* on May 26, 1918, along with a congratulatory message, three articles were published, entitled – "Independent Georgia has Risen, Long Live Georgia!", "Facing Georgian Independence," and "On a New Path."⁹

Despite the different worldviews of the newspapers, on May 26, 1918, a century after Georgia's independence had been lost, the editorial policy and, in some cases, the mixed attitude towards the declaration of independence saw a certain turn. Independent Georgia became the central issue, and the main discussion swung towards its conservation and consolidation. The list of topics related to Georgia's independence was extensive: speeches were organized in the country on the Ottoman occupation of part of Georgia; active cooperation with Germany; the situation in Bolshevik Russia and the emanating threat; the difficult socio-economic situation in Georgia; etc.

Obviously, in this article, we cannot cover all the issues that featured in the Georgian press in 1918-1921, but we will try to talk about one of the main interests of that independent Georgian press – Bolshevik Russia. More precisely, how the Georgian press of 1918-1921 perceived and reflected on the threat coming from them.

Given that, in the Georgian press of 1918-1921, we find information about Bolshevik Russia in relation to Georgia almost every day, it is first necessary to highlight a few important events that are subject of interest for this

⁶ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №99, May 18, 1918.

⁷ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №98, May 18, 1918.

⁸ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №106, May 26, 1918.

⁹ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №101, May 26, 1918.



article. The first of these is related to the sovietization of Georgia’s neighboring states, Azerbaijan and Armenia, in 1920, and the new threat to independent Georgia that emerged as a result of the changed reality. The next issue is the agreement signed between Georgia and Russia in May 1920 and the attitude of the Georgian press towards this agreement. And finally, the biggest issue is the occupation of Georgia by Soviet Russia in February 1921.

We chose three major representatives of the independent Georgian press of 1918-1921, the newspapers *Sakartvelo*, *Ertoba* and *Sakartvelos Respublika*, to discuss the issues of interest to us.

April 1920 – The Sovietization of Azerbaijan

Of the three independent states of the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan was the first to be sovietized. On April 27, 1920, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and the Baku Bureau of the Caucasus Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party issued an ultimatum to the Baku Government and gave them twelve hours to hand over power. While the Azerbaijani parliament debated the ultimatum, Russian troops had already crossed the Azerbaijani border and were rapidly advancing towards Baku. This, in fact, meant the end of independent Azerbaijan. The session decided: “Power will be handed over to the Bolsheviks, and the government and parliament will be considered dissolved from this day on.”¹⁰ By 23:00, Baku was al-

ready in the hands of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

Information about the sovietization of Azerbaijan appeared in the Georgian press at the end of April 1920. The official bulletin of the Government of Georgia, the newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, wrote on April 29, 1920:

“Due to the situation created at the borders of the republic, the government has decided to establish a ‘Council for the Protection of the Republic’ chaired by the head of the government. The Council will include the ministers of military, interior, and foreign affairs, the Commander-in-Chief of All Armed Forces, Deputy Military Minister Gedevanishvili, and the Chief of Staff of the People’s Guard.”

“General Kvinitadze is appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic.”¹¹

The same issue of the newspaper published information on the mobilization, reserve army, and military rules, as well as the call of the Chairman of the Government of Georgia, Noe Zhordania. It is worth outlining part of this call, where Noe Zhordania notes:

“The northern threat has come to the gates of Georgia. The Bolshevik army entered Baku without a fight and declared Soviet rule. Azerbaijan opened the door to them, which

¹⁰ Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia 1917-1921* (in Georgian), Tbilisi, 2016, p. 352.

¹¹ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №94, 1920, April 29.



The Red Army in Baku, May 1, 1920

indicates a preliminary agreement between Moscow and Erzurum. Georgia, Georgia's democracy, and its creative work of so many years, is in trouble."¹²

The quote from the Prime Minister's address published in the Republic of Georgia clearly indicates that the change of government in Azerbaijan was duly assessed in Georgia – it was perceived as an action by Bolshevik Russia and considered a great threat to Georgia. Another question is what the independent Republic of Georgia could actually do to avoid that threat.

Talk about the new threat to Georgia posed by the sovietization of Azerbaijan also continued in the pages of *Sakartvelos Respublika* in the following days. In this regard, the extensive speech of Noe Zhordania, published in the issue of May 1, 1920, which he had delivered the previous day at the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, deserves attention. However, here we cite only the part that is related to the threat to Georgia's independence posed by the sovietization of Azerbaijan:

"Once again, ominous political clouds loom over us; bordering Soviet Russia is gradually becoming a threat to our young republic. It approached us first from the north, from the direction of Sochi, and now it is at our doorstep in the east, through Azerbaijan."



General Giorgi Kvinitadze

"The first circumstance does not cause any fear in us, as it is impossible to overcome Dariali and Gagra. The direction of Azerbaijan is a completely different story, where the borders are open, and that is why today I want to draw your attention towards this issue."¹³

It can be said that Noe Zhordania's fears were well-founded. Indeed, the sovietization of Georgia in February 1921 began with an invasion from the eastern and southern borders of the country.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №96, 1920, May 1.



Noe Zhordania

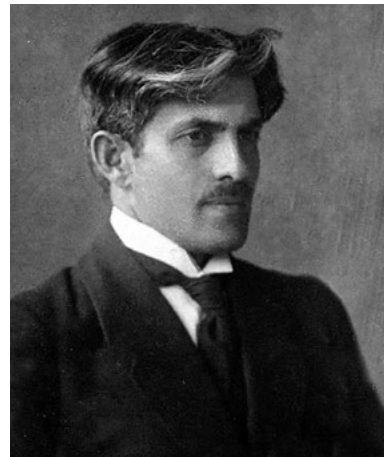
An interesting article about the sovietization of Azerbaijan was published in the April 29, 1920, issue of the newspaper *Ertoba*. On the one hand, *Ertoba* called the event in Baku a "Bolshevik coup,"¹⁴ and on the other hand, it did not rule out that the sovietization of Baku might be better for Georgia. The reason for this, it indicated, was the situation two years prior, when the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic did not adequately resist the threat posed by the Ottomans. *Ertoba* wrote:

"Perhaps our situation today is better than it was yesterday. Our short-term perspective is clear and unambiguous. Today, we have our hands free and we can arrange our defense solely according to our interests."¹⁵

The subsequent chronology of events and the processes that took place in February-March 1921 testify to the fact that the optimism of newspaper *Ertoba* was ultimately futile. The sovietization of Azerbaijan signified that the sovietization of Georgia was imminent.

Agreement of May 7, 1920

Shortly after the sovietization of Azerbaijan in November 1920, Soviet Russia sovietized another neighbor of Georgia – Armenia. However, before that, one remarkable event took place, seeing a most important agreement signed between Georgia and Russia on May 7, 1920. It was signed from the Georgian side by special envoy



Grigol Uratadze



Lev Karakhan

Grigol Uratadze,¹⁶ a member of the Constituent Assembly, and by Lev Karakhan on behalf of the Russian side. With this agreement, Russia recognized the independence of Georgia. Article 1 of the agreement reads:

"Relying on the recognition of the Russian Socialist Federal Republic of the right of all nations to self-determination and full secession from the states of which these nations are members, Russia unconditionally recognizes the independence of the Georgian state and voluntarily renounces all sovereign rights it held vis-à-vis the Georgian people and the country."¹⁷

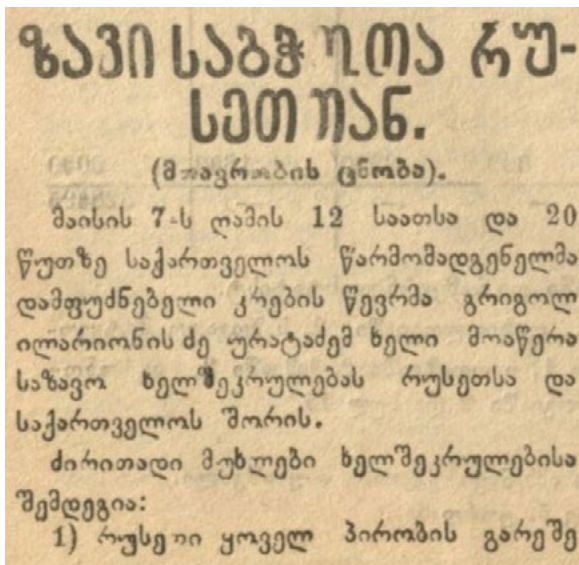
Although the agreement was signed on May 7, 1920, the text of the agreement appeared in the Georgian press only later, in June of that year. The text of the agreement was published in the newspaper *Sakartvelos*

¹⁴ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №95, 1920, April 29.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *sakartvelos dampudznebeli kreba 1919* (Constituent Assembly of Georgia 1919), Research Laboratory of the Soviet Past, Tbilisi, 2016, p. 383.

¹⁷ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №125, 1920, June 8.



Zurab Avalishvili

Respublika on June 8. Despite the significance of the agreement, there was no extensive discussion or deliberation offered about the agreement on the pages of *Sakartvelos Respublika* in the following days.

The agreement of May 7, 1920, was published in the newspaper *Ertoba*¹⁸ on June 7 and 8 of the same year, and the next day, an article about the agreement was published on the front page of the newspaper, titled "The Core Ideas of the Agreement."¹⁹ The main focus of the article was on the neutrality of Georgia, and thus the agreement was analyzed in this context. The emphasis on the issue of neutrality was due to the fact that, according to *Ertoba*, the newspaper *Komunisti* (Communist) had declared Georgia an ally of Soviet Russia based on Article 5²⁰ of the May 7, 1920 agreement. *Ertoba* itself did not see this danger and wrote:

"We do not think that the rulers of Soviet Russia would agree with their local reckless underdogs to give such an interpretation to any article of the treaty, and thus make it impossible to reach an agreement and good-neighborly relations with Georgia."²¹

The famous Georgian scientist and diplomat Zurab Avalishvili highlighted the fifth article of the agreement of

May 7, 1920. In his book *The Independence of Georgia in International Politics, 1918-1921*, published in Paris in 1924, while discussing the fifth article of the treaty, Avalishvili notes: "Thereby, Georgia made it its direct obligation to facilitate the end of the British occupation of Batumi and the Batumi District, and rejected beforehand any potential assistance in organizing its armed forces. It was a clear recognition of the Moscow government's political influence and superiority, and, in fact, meant an abandonment of the 'European orientation'."²²

In June 1920, when the Georgian press was talking about the May 7 agreement between Russia and Georgia, this issue was not thoroughly discussed. Moreover, nothing was said about the secret article of the contract, which was kept hidden and could not have been known to the press. In this part of the agreement, Georgia made the biggest concession to Russia – "Georgia takes responsibility to recognize the Communist Party's right to free existence and activity... in particular, freedom of assembly and publication (including the press)."²³ As Firuz Kazemzadeh, an honorary professor at Yale University, notes: "In fact, the first clause of the secret agreement allowed Russia to interfere in the internal affairs of Georgia in favor of the Georgian Bolsheviks, who were already guaranteed freedom of action by this agreement."²⁴ Later, in December 1920, the newspaper *Sakartvelo*

¹⁸ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №125, 1920, June 6; №126, 1920, June 7th.

¹⁹ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №127, 1920, June 9.

²⁰ Under Article 5 of the treaty, Georgia stated that it would disarm and seize naval and military units that started acting on behalf of Russia or its allies. It would also treat in the same way all those whose goal was to overthrow Russia and its allies.

²¹ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №127, 1920, June 9.

²² Zurab Avalishvili, *sakartvelos damoukidebloba 1918-1921 tslebis saertashoriso politikashi* (Independence of Georgia in International Politics, 1918-1921), Tbilisi, 2011, p. 334.

²³ Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia 1917-1921*, p. 371.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 371.



Armenian people greeting Soviet troops in Yerevan, November 29, 1920

wrote about this threat in a small article entitled "Then and Now":

"Uratadze's agreement, and the legalization of the Bolshevik actions, has contributed to the expansion of the Bolsheviks in our country. Today, the Bolsheviks have organized a party organization in Georgia. They are asserting the majority in some worker circles of the city, for example among the print workers."²⁵

November 1920 – The Sovietization of Armenia

The sovietization of Armenia, another neighbor of Georgia, took place in late November 1920. While the Armenian authorities were trying to settle the situation with Turkey, the Bolshevik Military-Revolutionary Committee marched from Azerbaijan to Armenia on November 28, 1920, and on the following day declared Soviet rule there.²⁶

After the sovietization of Armenia, the Georgian press reports and appeals about the threat from Russia

were not as clear-cut as those accompanying the sovietization of Azerbaijan. The appeal, published on the pages of the official bulletin of the Government of Georgia – *Sakartvelos Respublika* – in early December 1920, mentions the need to establish a defense fund, and identifies Turkey as a major threat, which might 'extend its reach from Armenia to Georgia'.²⁷

On December 5, 1920, *Sakartvelos Respublika* reported that the new government which was to replace the previous government of Armenia included five communists, and that Soviet Russia had recognized the free and independent Soviet Republic of Armenia.²⁸

The newspaper *Sakartvelo* dedicated a relatively extensive letter to the sovietization of Armenia. In an article with the eloquent headline "As in the Past, We Stand Alone," the newspaper singled out several key issues, two of which can be cited: Russia subverted the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan and, by crushing the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Georgian borders and, consequently, the country as a whole, was threatened by the enemy – Russia.²⁹

²⁵ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №167, 1920, December 7.

²⁶ Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia 1917-1921*, p. 357.

²⁷ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №274, 1920, December 2.

²⁸ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №277, 1920, December 5.

²⁹ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №164, December 3, 1920.

The newspaper *Sakartvelo* continued to write about the threat to Georgia's independence due to the sovietization of Armenia by Russia in the following days. Undoubtedly, an outstanding article in this regard was published in the December 8, 1920 issue, stating:

"An arc has formed! Only the sea is left to our state, connecting it with peoples of culture and states that defend decency and righteousness. Three sides, the whole land line, not only do not allow our homeland to have a proper relationship and connection with educated humanity, but this arc also poses a great danger to Georgia's state independence ..."³⁰

Articles about the events in Armenia were also published in the newspaper *Ertoba*. The publishers of the newspaper believed that the processes in Armenia were influenced from abroad and were not the result of the decision of the majority of the local population.³¹ Moreover, *Ertoba* openly wrote that the overthrow of Armenian independence was the real face of the Soviet Russian "assistance."

"Armenia, tortured and exhausted by the invasion of the Ottoman army, was occupied by the Red Army of Soviet Russia."³²

The more actively *Ertoba* wrote about the sovietization of Armenia by Russia, the less it spoke about the new ordeal facing Georgia through that sovietization.

It can be said that in 1920, the publishers of the newspaper *Sakartvelo* saw and analyzed better than other members of the Georgian press the obvious threat posed by the establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan and Armenia, which threatened Georgia's independence. They also understood that the crushing of Georgian independence was only a matter of time.

February 1921 – The Sovietization of Georgia

The last issue to be discussed in this article concerns the occupation of Georgia by Soviet Russia in February 1921, which, along with the end of the independent Republic of Georgia, was followed by the disappearance of the independent Georgian press.

The newspaper *Sakartvelo* wrote as early as January 30, 1921, that the goal of the Bolsheviks was not only to change the government in Georgia, they were also against the idea of Georgia's independence. The news-



Aron Scheinman

paper also spoke about the planned conspiracy against Georgia in Borchalo County.³³

The newspaper *Ertoba* reported on Russian-inspired provocations in late January 1921, but attributed them to local representatives of the Russian Soviet government and not to Russia itself.³⁴

The Georgian press of 1921 testified that, in early February, its main topic was the de jure recognition of the Georgian state, which, by the decision of the Allies, was realized on January 27, 1921. Congratulations from the local³⁵ and foreign government officials were published one after another in the press.³⁶ Among them was a congratulatory message from the Russian representative in Georgia, Aaron Scheinman.³⁷ The newspaper *Sakartvelo* did not believe in the sincerity of the congratulations from Russia on the de jure recognition of Georgia and dedicated a separate article to this issue on February 4, 1921, titled "The Face of the Bolsheviks."³⁸

On February 5, 1921, the newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika* published a timetable of the event scheduled for February 6 to celebrate the de jure recognition of the Georgian state.³⁹ In the February 6 issue of the newspaper, the following text was written in capital letters on the first, second, and third pages:

"Today the Georgian nation is celebrating, as our Republic finally received legal recognition on January 27, 1921!"

³³ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №22, January 30, 1921.

³⁴ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №21, January 29, 1921.

³⁵ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №23, 1921, February 1.

³⁶ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №24, 1921, February 2.

³⁷ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №25, 1921, February 3.

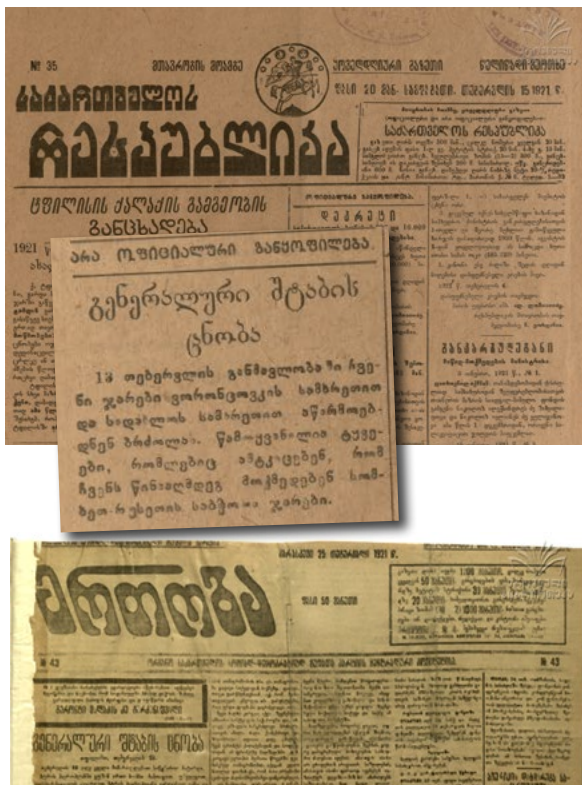
³⁸ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №26, 1921, February 4.

³⁹ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №27, 1921, February 5.

³⁰ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №168, December 8, 1920.

³¹ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №276, December 3, 1920.

³² Newspaper *Ertoba*, №277, 1920, December 4.



“The wise policy of Georgia’s democracy and its government has prevailed: Georgia has been recognized legally!”

“From now on, external threats will not frighten us, because European democracy is on our side! But the devious enemy will not lay down its arms! We need domestic strength and preparation for defense!”⁴⁰

An extract of an interview of Russian representative in Georgia Aaron Scheinman, with reporters of the newspaper *Slovo*, was published in the newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika* on February 11, 1921, in which Scheinman stated that Russia was happily endorsing legal recognition of Georgia.⁴¹ On the very day *Sakartvelos Respublika* was sharing Sheinman’s opinion of the joy of Soviet Russia for the legal recognition of Georgia’s independence, an uprising incited by the Bolsheviks was begun in the country.⁴² From that day on, the Georgian press moved directly into chronicling the war, sharing stories about celebrations, speeches, and events related to the de jure recognition of Georgia.

⁴⁰ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №28, 1921, February 6.
⁴¹ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №32, 1921, February 11.
⁴² Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia 1917-1921*, p. 392.

The first information about the uprising appeared in the press on February 13, 1921. The General Staff reported the attack. The notice indicated both the beginning of the uprising and the invasion of regular troops from the Armenian side.⁴³

Particular attention should be paid to the speech of Noe Zhordania, published in *Sakartvelos Respublika* on February 16, 1921, which he had delivered the day before at the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. The main addressee of Zhordania’s speech was Armenia. The title of the published speech also referred to the guile attack of Armenia and said virtually nothing about Russia. Moreover, according to Zhordania, Armenia had asked Russia for help, but the Georgian Prime Minister hoped that Russia would firmly uphold the May 7, 1920 agreement.⁴⁴ Clearly, Zhordania’s hopes were futile, as Bolshevik Russia was involved in the process from the very beginning.

The newspaper *Ertoba* wrote in the same vein. In its February 15, 1921 issue, the newspaper reported that Armenia was fighting against Georgia with the help of Baku, and not Russia.⁴⁵ However, in the next issue of the newspaper, *Ertoba* emphasized the participation of Soviet Russia in the whole process.⁴⁶

Unlike other newspapers, the reality was more clearly perceived by the newspaper *Sakartvelo*, on the pages of which appeared headlines in large capital letters: “Russian-Armenian invasion in Borchalo;”⁴⁷ “War with Russia-Armenia”⁴⁸ and others. In a call issued on February 18, 1920, *Sakartvelo* showed no doubt that, in fact, Bolshevik Russia was fighting against Georgia:

“The Bolshevik Red Army is marching against Georgia; it is directly responsible for the destruction and decay of the entire vast territory of Russia; it has devastated the oblivious, vulnerable Russian people.”⁴⁹

“Once again, the old, quite familiar, Russian executioner is marching on Georgia, wearing a different coat and painted in different colors, while his heart remains black, full of cruelty.”⁵⁰

⁴³ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №34, 1921, February 13.
⁴⁴ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №36, 1921, February 16.
⁴⁵ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №35, 1921, February 15.
⁴⁶ Newspaper *Ertoba*, №36, 1921, February 16.
⁴⁷ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №35, 1921, February 15.
⁴⁸ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №37, 1921, February 17.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Ibid.



In the following days, calls and announcements from the front line continued to be actively published in the Georgian press. The press had less and less time to write an analytical article or opinion about the war being waged by Soviet Russia against Georgia. The number of pages decreased. The February 18, 1921 release of the *Sakartvelos Respublika*, as well as the ones issued in the following days, was published on two pages instead of four.⁵¹ According to the same principle, the publication of the newspaper *Ertoba* was also reduced from four to two pages.⁵²

On February 18, 1921, the front pages of the newspapers *Sakartvelos Respublika*⁵³ and *Sakartvelo*⁵⁴ published a plea by Noe Zhordania, which was dated February 16 and sent to the governments of foreign countries. Given the war and the reality on the ground, the text of the plea focused on Soviet Russia. Zhordania reminded the civilized world that by these actions, Russia was violating every agreement signed between Georgia and Russia.

On February 18, 1921, on the very first page of the two-page *Sakartvelos Respublika*, an article was published with the title “Let’s Defend Tbilisi!” Along with other issues related to the war, it stated:

“We need to stop the enemy for just a few days and its case will be lost, Tbilisi will be saved, the homeland rescued! We have to give the army and the guard rest for only two or three days! From the day the war started, they have had neither rest nor sleep.”⁵⁵

Despite the analysis of *Sakartvelos Respublika* and its numerous appeals, the situation was worsening. The press was already speaking openly about the proclamations spread by the Bolsheviks. On February 23, 1921, *Sakartvelo* reported on the proclamations of the Shulaveri Committee:

“These proclamations are another tool of provocation of the Russian Bolsheviks. A naive person may think that the Russian Red Army soldiers are shedding their blood because they want to put Phillippe Makharadze in the Georgian government.

⁵¹ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №38, 1921, February 18; №39, 1921, February 19; №40, 1921, February 22; №41, 1921, February 23.

⁵² Newspaper *Ertoba*, №38, 1921, February 19; №39, 1921, February 20; №40, 1921, February 22; №41, 1921, February 23; №42, 1921, February 24; №43, 1921, February 25.

⁵³ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №38, 1921, February 18.

⁵⁴ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №38, 1921, February 18.

⁵⁵ Newspaper *Sakartvelos Respublika*, №38, 1921, February 18.



The Red Army in
Tbilisi, February 25,
1921

“Indeed, one of the goals of the Russian Bolsheviks is to destroy the Republic of Georgia and thus subdue it to Greater Russia, as was done in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and wherever they went. Supposedly, not a single Russian is involved in the Shulaveri Revcom, but who does not understand that this is a convenient fishhook aiming to bait the vigilance and defensive energy of the Georgian people.”⁵⁶

Everything became clear, though belatedly. A decision was made to leave Tbilisi and retreat to Mtskheta on February 24, 1921. The government then moved to western Georgia, and the Georgian capital was occupied by the 11th Red Army on February 25, 1921.⁵⁷

After the retreat of the government of independent Georgia from Tbilisi, the publication of most daily newspapers ceased. However, *Ertoba* remained, continuing to publish in Kutaisi and Batumi until the Georgian government emigrated. The last release of the newspaper was published⁵⁸ on March 16, 1921, and thus, in fact, along with the Independent Republic of Georgia of 1918-1921, the independent Georgian press also came to an end.

⁵⁶ Newspaper *Sakartvelo*, №42, 1921, February 23.

⁵⁷ O. Janelidze, *sakartvelos demokratiuli respublikis narkvevebi* (Essays on the Democratic Republic of Georgia), Tbilisi, 2018, p. 313.

⁵⁸ O. Janelidze, M. Khositashvili, L. Taktakishvili, *bechdviti sitkva tbilisshi (1918-1921)* (Printed Word in Tbilisi 1918-1921), Tbilisi, 2020, p. 126.

Finally, to summarize:

- ✘ In May 1918, the Georgian press did not meet the Declaration of Georgian independence with equal enthusiasm and support. However, after the declaration was made, the main topic for the press became the strengthening of that independence;
- ✘ In April 1920, after the sovietization of independent Azerbaijan by Bolshevik Russia, the Georgian government and the Georgian press clearly saw the threat that the sovietization of Azerbaijan posed to the country's independence;
- ✘ During the sovietization of Armenia by Bolshevik Russia, the government and press did not perceive the threat clearly;
- ✘ The agreement of May 7, 1920, was often a cause of unjustified self-confidence and negligence for both the government and the Georgian press. It was inconceivable to high-ranking officials that Bolshevik Russia would violate the treaty and infringe upon Georgia's independence;
- ✘ In February 1921, during the initial phase of aggression against Georgia, the first assessments of the government and much of the press indicated that Georgia had been attacked not by Bolshevik Russia, but Armenia;
- ✘ During the existence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, (1918-1921), unlike a large part of the Georgian press, the newspaper *Sakartvelo* perceived the threats coming from Bolshevik Russia more clearly and distinctly.