

THE RESULTS OF THE RUSSIAN-OTTOMAN WAR OF 1877-1878 AND BATUMI

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Abstract: Batumi is one of the well-known cities in the Black Sea basin. Its importance is primarily due to its convenient geostrategic location and deep, naturally protected harbour. It is one of the points of the South Caucasian highway connecting Europe and Asia.

From the beginning of the 20th century, Batumi became the area of interest of the growing Russian Empire. Nevertheless, Russia mastered it only after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. The Ottomans were defeated and forced to offer a truce to Russia. On January 31, 1878, the Two Powers signed the agreement. The negotiations continued in San Stefano, on March 3, 1878, and both sides signed a truce. With this agreement, Russia received political and territorial concessions from the Ottomans, including Batumi.

The results of the San Stefano negotiations were unacceptable for England and Austria. Austria demanded convening the European Congress, which would revise the San Stefano Agreement. England supported this request. Both states started preparations for the war. Encouraged by them, Ottomans considered continuing the fight. Turkish and English emissaries in the conflict zones also encouraged the uprising of the local Muslim population against the Russians. This process is visible in the official correspondence of the English representatives of this period. The local Christians were in the ranks of Russia's opponents. According to our observation, they were "Catholic Armenians" who were mainly of Georgian origin and were called "Armenians" because of their faith. In such a situation, Russia had to agree to the invitation of participating in the Berlin Congress and the revision of the San Stefano Treaty.

At the Congress of Berlin (June 13th-July 13th, 1878), Russia was able to preserve most of the articles of the Treaty of San Stefano. With the consent of England, Russia finally acquired Batumi. However, until the last moment in St. Petersburg, they did not believe in the possibility of receiving Batumi from the Ottomans.

According to the available materials, England retreated in the diplomatic struggle because of the behind-the-scenes intervention of the representative of the powerful Rothschild clan – the Rothschild Paris banking house, which ultimately determined the fate of Batumi. The Rothschilds needed Batumi to be part of the Russian Empire as a cheap way of exporting oil from Baku.

Batumi became an important port and industrial city. The Russian Empire acquired a favourable corridor to export oil and oil products to the West from Baku.

As for the Georgian nation itself, the positive side of the events mentioned above was the transfer of Adjara-Batumi and other historical Georgian territories from the possession of the Ottomans to the hands of the Russian Empire. Thus, the various parts of Georgia gathered in one political space.

Keywords: Batumi, Russo-Ottoman War, Catholic Armenians, Rothschilds, Berlin Congress.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 19th century, it became clear that the vast Ottoman Empire was experiencing a massive crisis from a military, political, and economic point of view. The weakness of the Ottoman Empire pushed neighbouring countries to take hold of its territories. Since 1822 (the Congress of Verona), this process became known as the "Eastern Issue".

"The Eastern Issue" as an international complication was on the agenda since the second half of the 18th century. As a matter of fact, it was a confrontation between the Great Powers of Europe, including

Russia, in the struggle for the succession of the Ottoman Empire. Russia was the most active in this clash. The aspirations of Russia were blocked by the major European states, including Great Britain in particular.

In the first half of the 19th century, specifically after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1828–1829, the role of Batumi as a seaport and a border town between the two Empires significantly increased. Consequently, interest in Batumi increased, both from the Russian Empire and the Great European States standing behind the Ottoman Empire. It was this struggle of interests that made Batumi an important town.

REVIEW OF SOURCES/LITERATURE

While working on the paper, we mainly used the documents published in the first two volumes of the three-volume collection of materials about Adjara preserved in the British National Archives (1830-1921), published in London in 2003.¹ These documents represent the correspondence and reports of British officials, which have been little studied and used in Georgian historiography.

In addition to the mentioned, we used proper Georgian² and Russian³ sources, as well as scientific literature data, which relate to our research topic from various angles.

METHODOLOGY

While studying and understanding the content of the sources, we used the methods of critical analysis of the sources, their mutual comparison and reconciliation with the scientific literature data, which, within the scope of the possibility, helped us to reconstruct the objective historical picture of the research period. Most of the sources are primary, which increases the objectivity of the work. While working on the text of the article, we were also guided by descriptive-narrative, analysis and synthesis methods.

DISCUSSION

Batumi, with its convenient geostrategic location and political and economic importance, attracted the attention of the growing Russian state from early on. In 1804, General Pavle Tsitsianov wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Empire, Chartoritsky, that Batumi "should belong to us without any resistance and it should be in our hands". The issue of joining Batumi was raised before the Russian Empire during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-1829. Nicholas the First said, "Batumi and Kars are worth sacrificing a few million for them".⁴

In the second half of the 19th century, Russia was already a country of great opportunities and claims. Accordingly, its aspirations for territorial expansion were great. Traditionally, the vast lands of the Ottoman Empire occupied a special place in Russia's expansionist policy. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it waged a series of successful wars against the Ottoman Empire and even expanded at its expense. Such a trend caused concern and dissatisfaction among Western European countries, including England, France and Austria.

The Batumi issue was one of the main problems in the Russian-Ottoman confrontation in the Transcaucasian political arena. "During every Turkish war, we tried to take Batumi into our hands" – Staff-Captain T.T. Stefanov honestly pointed out in the 1906 anniversary edition "Батумъ и его окрестности" ("Batumi and Its Surroundings").⁵

The Ottoman Empire also well understood the importance of Batumi and the seriousness of the expected danger that could be created for the inner regions of Anatolia in case of the loss of the said town. Therefore, the empire spared no effort to protect the surroundings of Batumi at an appropriate level, in which it also used the support of European states. It was the result of these efforts that, despite many successful wars with Ottomans during the 19th century, Russia could not capture Batumi. Petersburg managed to realize its cherished dream only as a result of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878.

¹ Adjara and the Russian Empire 2003.

² Kazbegi 1995; Aslanishvili-Bavreli 2008; Chichinadze 1905 etc.

³ Френкелі 1879; Стефанов 1906.

⁴ ШИЛЬДЕР 1903, 259.

⁵ Стефанов 1906, 90-91.

In this war, as it is known, the Ottomans were defeated and forced to offer a truce to Russia. On January 31st, 1878, a temporary agreement was signed between them. Negotiations continued in San Stefano – the western outskirts of Constantinople (nowadays Eshilkioi in Istanbul) and on March 3rd, 1878, both sides signed a truce. With this agreement, Russia received serious political and territorial concessions from the Ottomans, including Batumi.

The results of the San Stefano negotiations turned out to be unacceptable for England and Austria. Austria demanded convening the European Congress, which would revise the San Stefano Agreement. England supported this request. Both states started preparations for war. Encouraged by them, Ottomans also started to think about continuing the fight. Turkish and English emissaries in the conflict zones also encouraged the uprising of the local Muslim population against the Russians. This process is observable in the official correspondence of the English representatives of this period.

As we learn from these documents, the population of the Sanjak of Lazistan, the center of which was Batumi and which included Ajara, Kobuleti, Machakheli, Klarjeti and Lazeti itself,⁶ protested the transfer of Batumi to Russia and demanded to enter the British protectorate. They appeared on behalf of the population and conducted negotiations with the British. Lazi delegates, who, as can be seen from the context of the documents, were representatives of the local aristocracy. It is quite possible, as often happens in such cases, that they did not express the point of view of the whole population of the Sanjak of Lazistan, who, by the way, are all referred to by the name of Lazes in the English side, but the fact is that behind them was a considerable part of that population, to whom the prospect of falling into the hands of Russia greatly was not acceptable. Here are some documents supporting this protest:

In a report dated April 13th, 1878, Vice-Consul Billiott informs the Marquess of Salisbury about the Lazes' protest against the Russians.⁷

In a petition dated April 17th, 1878, to Her Majesty's Government (meaning the Queen of England – author), the population of Batumi protested against the expected annexation of the town by the Russians.⁸

In a letter dated April 18th, 1878, to Vice-Consul Billiott, the Laz beys (lords) request the protection of Great Britain.⁹

According to the April 21st, 1878 report, Vice Consul Billiott Austin H. Layard is informed that the Laz delegates are ready to oppose Russian annexation and are asking for British protection.¹⁰

Austin H. Layard's May 4th, 1878 report to the Marquess of Salisbury reveals that, according to the Laz delegates, on May 3rd the Russians entered Lower Ajara through Upper Ajara, where the population resisted and their weapons were confiscated, and that the population hoped for sympathy from the British authorities and people.¹¹

On May 7th, Austin H. Layard sends a telegram to the Marquess of Salisbury, which he received the previous day from the Laz delegates, in which the Laz again ask for British help and protection.¹²

The residents of Trabzon and other neighboring countries also protested the transfer of Batumi to Russia. What is the most interesting is that among the protestants there are also Christians next to the Muslims. I present the relevant document:

"Vice-Consul Billiotti to Mr. Layard. (Telegraphic.)

Trebizond, April 25, 1878, 8 p.m.

An address, signed by 943 leading Mussulman and Christian inhabitants of Trebizond, has been just forwarded through Governor-General to the Turkish Prime Minister, showing that the

⁶ Kazbegi 1995, 117.

⁷ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 668.

⁸ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 670-671.

⁹ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 669.

¹⁰ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 670.

¹¹ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 673.

¹² Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 673.

commercial and political interests of Batoum are so blended with those of Trebizond, that the cession of the former will be the ruin of the latter, and that its inhabitants cannot remain indifferent to the efforts of the Laz to prevent annexation to Russia. Similar addresses are said to be signed in other quarters".¹³

It is an interesting fact – a part of the Christian population of Trebizond and Lazistan Sanjaks is anti-Russian. Based on the official correspondence of the representatives of England, we think that a significant part of the anti-Russian Christians is so-called “Armenians, professing the Catholic faith”. The collective telegram of Artvinian (Livannian) Armenians to the British representation allows us to make such an assumption, in which they demand England's protection from Russian aggression. Representative (delegate) of the Artvinian Armenians on May 6 sent the appeal by telegram to the Vice-Consul in Trabzon, Alfred Billiotti, who delivered it to the British Ambassador in Istanbul, Mr. Austin Henry Layard, on May 7th, and from there the mentioned telegram was sent to Prime Minister Robert Arthur Salisbury in England. The path taken by the address indicates its meaning. We present here the appropriate document:

"Mr. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury. – (Received May 7)

Therapia, May 7, 1878. (Telegraphic)

Following from Vice-Consul Biliotti, dated Trebizond, May 7, 1878

"I received the following telegram, dated Batoum, 6th instant, 6 p.m., signed by the delegate of the Christians of Livannah:

"While living in peace with our Mussulman neighbours at Livannah, our beloved country, a few days ago, Russian soldiers, under the command of General Koumaroff, unexpectedly invaded our town against the law of nations and [justice?]. Owing to the existence of peace, we offered no resistance. The Russian soldiers and their officers tread under their feet the honour of our families: there being no longer any security for life, property, and honour, we are bewildered. In the name of Christianity, you can interfere on our behalf. Save us from Russian oppression. Having shut up our houses, and abandoned our country, our lands, and other property, we proceed with our children and wives to other parts of the Ottoman dominions, it being beyond doubt that similar acts cannot be tolerated by any nation, and to protect our honour against the conduct of the Russians. I beg in the name of the whole community of Armenia, of which I am the delegate, to bring their [acts] to the knowledge of your Government through Her Majesty's Ambassador".¹⁴

The document clearly shows the anti-Russian attitude of the Livanian (Artvinian) Armenians. The overwhelming majority of Armenians living in Klarjeti and Artvin were followers of the Catholic faith. For example, in the 1872 report of Gifford Palgrave, the English consul in Trabzon, it is indicated that one-third of the population of Artvin was Armenians, most of whom were Catholics.¹⁵ The anti-Russian attitude of Catholic Armenians is indicated by the fact that, as it is proved by the report of Vice-Consul Billiotti on August 23rd, 1878, according to Sir A. H. Layard,¹⁶ as well as Billiotti's reports of September 4th¹⁷ and September 18th¹⁸ to the Marquess of Salisbury, the English emissary and mediator with the Laz was the Armenian-Catholic priest Don Gregorio Puccinian (Don Gregorio Poutchinian), who had a influence on Laz beys (lords). By the way, the Catholic Puchinians are from Artvin.

The pro-European orientation of the Catholic Armenians of Batumi and its district can be seen even after the accession of Batumi to the Russian Empire. Vice-Consul Billiotti, in a report sent to the Marquess of Salisbury on February 11th, 1879, indicates:

"Vice-Consul Biliotti to the Marquis of Salisbury. – (Received February 25.)

¹³ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 673.

¹⁴ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 673-674.

¹⁵ Отчёт консула Пальгрева 1882, 58.

¹⁶ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 733.

¹⁷ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 734.

¹⁸ Adjara and the Ottoman Empire 2003, 741.

(№19. Political.)

Trebizond, February 11. 1879.

My Lord,

... The French Government have abolished their Vice-Consulate at Poti and established one at Batoum, to which post has been appointed M. Rheins, the Cancellor of the Consulate at Tiflis, with a salary of 12,000 fr. A-year.

The change does not seem opportune for the protection of French trade, for the reason that Poti continues to be the landing port of goods to Persia and that many years are likely to elapse before it is superseded by Batoum. But the French Government may have been moved by considerations of another kind.

As M. Rheins, who has taken possession of his post only since last month, is already devising, together with the resident Roman Catholic Armenians, the erection of a church at Batoum, it may be presumed that the French Government have perhaps in view to establish a sort of influence in that quarter, by helping the Roman Catholic Armenians, who form where the majority of the Christian population.

An Ottoman Consul has also been appointed to Batoum and is shortly expected from Constantinople on his way to his post.

I have, Etc.

(Signed) ALFRED BILIOTTI".¹⁹

As it is clear from the document, France, taking into account the convenient location of Batumi, its potential and prospects, plans to strengthen its influence on this town and for this purpose tries to use the Catholics here. In addition to the common religion, the Catholic anti-Russian mood of the Batumi district also played its role in making this decision.

It should be noted here that the so-called people "Catholic Armenians" living in Batumi and its district came from the area of the town of Artvin and, as it turns out, the absolute majority of them were of Georgian origin.

Dimitri Bakradze focuses on the issue of the origin of the Catholic Armenians of the Artvin region. In the report of the archaeological expedition conducted in Chorokhi Valley in 1879, the researcher points out: "It should be noted that the so-called Armenian-Catholics turned out to be mostly of Georgian origin. They have come under the influence of the Armenian clergy and have lost their native language, but their current conversational Armenian language is so heavily influenced by Georgian words that it represents a special Georgian-Armenian language. Tiflis Armenians employed in the Artvin district told me that they would not understand the speech of the Armenian-Catholics here if they did not know the Georgian language".²⁰

Many authors of that time also point to the obvious difference between so-called "Catholic Armenians" from Artvin and Batumi and the other Armenians.²¹

In general, serious rivalry and enmity existed between Catholic and Gregorian Armenians since ancient times.²² Interestingly, this enmity was especially felt in the Artvin area.

Colonel V. Lisovsky, who describes the situation in the Batumi region in the 80s of the 19th century, points to the intense conflict between the Catholic and Gregorian Armenian clergy. According to him, in recent times, this controversy has intensified so much that Catholics were forbidden to enter the Gregorian Church for fear of committing a mortal sin.²³ We do not rule out that the reason for such

¹⁹ Adjara and the Russian Empire 2003, 35.

²⁰ Бакрадзе 1880, 3.

²¹ Aslanishvili-Bavreli 2008, 116; Frenkel 1879, 9; Lisovsky 1887, 62.

²² De Tournafort 1988, 66-67; Maisuradze 1982, 267.

²³ Лисовский 1887, 65.

radicalism was not only religious but also ethnic-origin differences between the Catholics here and the Gregorian Armenians.

Z. Chichinadze, who was well aware of the current situation, proves the Georgian origin of the Catholic Armenians of Artvin. Here is what he writes:

"Today, the Armenian-Catholics of Artvin are made up of Catholics of Georgian descent, and they were Armenianized by the time, they lost the Georgian language and they forgot their origin. However, many Armenian Catholics here know that they are descendants of Georgians... All the Armenian Catholics of Artvin are Georgians by descent, the Georgian language was shaken to its core in the 1780s and then disappeared everywhere until 1800".²⁴

Z. Chichinadze considers the appointment of Armenian Catholic priests instead of Latin priests as the reason for the Armenian conversion of Georgian Catholics, which happened around 1720²⁵ and which led to the dominance of the Armenian language among the Catholics, and then, gradually, the establishment of Armenian consciousness.

Let's go back to the events of 1878. As we mentioned, Great Britain and Austria, dissatisfied with the San Stefano Agreement, started preparations for the war. At the same time, Turkish and English emissaries in conflict zones incited the local population against the Russians.

The eyewitness and participant of the events of that time A. Frenkel in his book "Essays on Churuk-su and Batumi" talks about the expected provocations in the conflict zone and the counter-measures implemented by the Russian side to prevent them.²⁶

Due to such activation of the opposing forces, Russia was forced to agree to the convening of the Congress of Berlin and the revision of the Treaty of San Stefano.

At the Congress of Berlin (June 13th - July 13th, 1878), Russia was able to preserve the main articles of the Treaty of San Stefano. With the consent of England and the force of the Berlin Treaty, Batumi was also left to it. However, it must be said that until the last moment in St. Petersburg, they did not believe in the possibility of ceding Batumi from the Ottomans.

As Russian researchers point out, the imperial court was aware of England's irreconcilable attitude regarding the transfer of Batumi, Kars and Ardagan (Artaan) to Russia, and Emperor Alexander II was internally ready to leave Batumi to the Ottomans. In such a situation, the unexpected consent given by England surprised him.²⁷ According to the conclusion of the same authors, the retreat of England in diplomatic wrestling was caused by the behind-the-scenes intervention of the representative of the powerful Rothschild clan – the Rothschild Paris banking house, which ultimately determined the fate of Batumi.²⁸

Regarding these issues, the Jewish researcher Clifford Shack goes even further. In his article – "The Sabbatean-Frankist Messianic Conspiracy Partially Exposed", he says: "In 1877, by arranging a war between their clients, the countries of Turkey and Russia, the Rothschilds ensured that the port of Batumi (an essential link in the transport of oil out of Baku) would be incorporated into Russia";²⁹ in another part of the work he notes the following: "Russian-Turkish War was instigated to incorporate the port of Batum into Russia where the Rothschilds had strong banking connections. It was from Batum that the Rothschilds would soon ship their Russian oil to the Far East Markets";³⁰

As we can see, the Jewish researcher even attributes the start of the war to the Rothschild family, which, given the scope of the Rothschilds' capabilities, should not be unbelievable.

²⁴ Chichinadze 1905, 37.

²⁵ Chichinadze 1905, 115-116.

²⁶ Френкель 1879, 5-7.

²⁷ Тимофеев 2011; Тарасов, Ермолаев 2008.

²⁸ Тимофеев 2011; Тарасов, Ермолаев 2008.

²⁹ Shack 2009, 334.

³⁰ Shack 2009, 400.

In the 19th century, the Rothschilds had the greatest influence on the politics and finances of European states, on the representatives of the highest echelon of the clergy and secular authorities. They could enthrone or dethrone someone; avoid wars if those wars endangered their millions; dismiss ministers and appointment of persons of their choice; govern parliaments and newspapers with money; get rid of competing banks and participate in the establishment of new ones; financing of numerous large political or industrial-economic events, etc.

The Rothschilds also invested money in wars and thereby increased their capital considerably. Interestingly, they did not hesitate to finance forces standing on different sides of the barricades in a parallel mode. For example, during the civil war in the United States of America in 1861-1865, the London banking house of the Rothschilds financed the Northerners, and the Paris House financed the Southerners.³¹

In the second half of the 19th century, Baku oil came to the attention of this powerful financial family. This interest was largely determined by the competition of the Rothschilds with the second Jewish financial clan - the Rockefellers established in the United States of America. The rich industries of Baku would have given the Rothschilds a great advantage, but it was not enough just to capture these industries. The Rothschilds needed a cheap and convenient way to export oil to Europe, a key market for petroleum products. The port of Batumi with its characteristics met such requirements, but it was within the Ottoman Empire. Industrial interests demanded that Batumi be handed over to Russia. In this way, Batumi-Baku would become the property of one country – in this case, Russia – and the oil export from Baku to Europe through Batumi would be carried out without obstacles and unnecessary costs.

Researcher Alexander Timofeev points out: "In the 19th century, the main task of the Rothschilds was to establish control over the Baku oil fields in Russia; they needed to put Batumi under the jurisdiction of Russia".³²

The Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 contributed to the realization of the mentioned idea. The goals of the Russian ruling circles and the Rothschilds about Batumi coincided with each other.

Thus, according to the results of the Berlin Congress, Batumi belonged to the Russian Empire, however, the Turkish side was in no hurry to evacuate the town and hand it over to the enemy. Russia has moved from protracted negotiations to active actions. Under the direct supervision of the viceroy's assistant Sviatopolk-Mirski, a reception-surrender commission was created, which was supposed to ensure the transfer of Batumi from the Turks. The head of the viceroy's field chancellery, Trubetskoj, colonel Gr. Gurriel and the former Russian vice-consul in Batumi Judichi were represented in that commission.³³

In parallel with the negotiations, to avoid any misunderstanding, Russia moved military units from three sides in the direction of Batumi: from Guria – through Cholok-Kobuleti, from Artvin – through Chorokhi, from Akhaltsikhe – through Upper Ajara. If necessary, it was planned to send additional military contingent from Poti and Nikolaevsk.³⁴

The Russian military units moving towards Batumi entered the town in the following order: on September 6th from Kobuleti side – under the command of the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus Army Sviatopolk-Mirski, on September 11th – through Artvin route to Chorokhi under the leadership of General K. Komarov, and on September 14th through Akhaltsikhe to Upper Ajara – under the leadership of General Treiter.³⁵ The Turkish authorities of Batumi handed over the town to the Russian delegation in a ceremonial situation. Under the roar of music and bells and the roar of Russian soldiers, the Ottoman flag was lowered and the flag of the Russian Empire was raised instead.³⁶

September 6th-14th, 1878, a new era began in the life of Batumi. This historical Georgian town of great political, military and economic importance passed from the ownership of the Ottoman Empire to the

³¹ Тимофеев 2011.

³² Тимофеев 2011.

³³ Френкель 1879, 6.

³⁴ Френкель 1879, 6.

³⁵ Essays on the History of South-West Georgia 2008, 54.

³⁶ Френкель 1879, 51-57.

hands of the Russian Empire. It was a great victory for Petersburg. According to A. Frenkel that the acquisition of Batumi and Kar's districts was the only real success of Russia in the war of 1877-1878.³⁷

Batumi turned into an important port and industrial town, and the Russian Empire acquired a highly favorable corridor for the export of oil and oil products to the West with the connection between Baku and Batumi.

Especially for Batumi and the people of Batumi, the domination of one empire was replaced by the domination of another one. Nevertheless, by the objective results of the current processes, the Georgian nation was also won to some extent – its parts that were secluded until now gathered in one political space, which created prospects for the restoration of a unified national body and consciousness.

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³⁷ Френкель 1879, 5.

BATUMI: A FREE CITY – PORT (1878 - 1886)

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Abstract: Batumi, part of the Russian Empire in 1878-1886, was known as Porto-Franco or Free Port. The Porto-Franco charter allowed unlimited import of foreign goods to Batumi. However, this privilege did not extend to goods manufactured in Russia for export purposes.

The borders of Porto-Franco were determined from the river Sari-Su, which is close to the central entrance of the present-day Batumi port building. Then it passed through the wet, deserted plain around today's Pushkini Street and ended at modern Javakhishvili and Griboedovi Streets. An area of about 22 square kilometres was surrounded by a deep trench and barbed wire. Customs duty was mandatory for all goods transported to that territory.

Historians have different opinions about how profitable the status of "Porto-Franco" was for the city. When Batumi was considered Porto-Franco, it was a small seaside town with four thousand people. The only way to reach Batumi was by sea, as the railway was not yet completed. For trade protection, 12 checkpoints were placed around the city, and all passers-by were thoroughly verified. Even the smallest amount of goods shipped was subject to customs duty. According to Kldiashvili, the border guards in Batumi acted capriciously and created difficulties during baggage inspection. The checks, which included searches of personal belongings and carry-on luggage, were conducted with rudeness and excessive use of authority, causing widespread dissatisfaction among passengers and leading to many complaints to senior government officials.

Keywords: Georgia, Batumi, Porto-Franco borders, surrounded by a deep moat, customs duty, border guards, tax laws, Porto-Franco abolition.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Batumi originates in a very distant past. The name of the city - Batusi - was initially mentioned by the Roman writer Pliny (23-79 AD) and the Greek geographer Arian (95-175 AD). According to their stories, Batusi was a small settlement on the banks of the river Batus. In 1373, the Greek historian Paneretus mentioned Batumi as a small village in his "Chronicles of Trabzon". Then, one hundred years later, the Venetian ambassador Ambrogio Contarini refers to Batus as a small fortress-town.

In the middle of the 16th century, Batumi was conquered several times by the Ottomans, but due to the committed struggle of the population, they could not maintain it for long, until the first quarter of the 18th century, when they finally managed to conquer it. Since the 20s of the 19th century, Batumi fell into the field of strategic interests of Russia, as a safe haven for ships. In 1853, Prince Vorontsov indicated that the "Small Port of Batumi is fairly considered as one of the finest. Even great trading ships can easily take shelter in it, during any kind of blizzard. Russian interests lay into exporting goods from Batumi Port into Europe and to ship timber and other natural resources from western Georgia. Russian interests lay in exporting goods from the Batumi Port into Europe and shipping timber and other natural resources from western Georgia. A trade-transit route from England to Iran passed through Batumi, which contradicted the interests of Russia as it was a major basis of England's intention to dominate Asia Minor.

Due to the absence of any taxes and fees on import and export across the Black Sea, smuggled goods were imported through the Batumi port in Georgia and Transcaucasia. English made products, which

easily competed in quality with Russian goods, were reaching to Guria, Samegrelo and Abkhazia. This fact, in turn, threatened the dominance of Russian tsarism in western Georgia. In 1828, Alexander Griboyedov and Dmitry Zalveisky developed the project according to which they demanded for the "Place for Storage" and their attention were focused on Batumi Port only, as an extremely advantageous place for the company, with its location. The company will construct a convenient commercial road by Batumi and would take any necessary measures essential for warehouses and factories.

Despite all the facts mentioned above, Russia was still interested in Batumi from a military-strategic point of view. For Russia, the prosperous districts of Batumi-Akhalsikhe, Batumi-Kars-Yerevan, Batumi-Tbilisi, Batumi-Artvin, and Artaani, would provide an opportunity to invade Asia Minor and resolve the issue of the security of south-western borders (Guria, Samegrelo, Imereti, and Abkhazia) from the Ottomans once and for all, while the Black Sea, as Karl Marx used to indicate, would turn into the "Russian Sea". Russia's foreign policy has put the issue of the essential need to annex Batumi on the agenda. The Russo-Ottoman Wars in 1804, 1806-1812, 1828-1829, 1853-1856 failed to bring the desired result for Russia. In 1858, the Russian Maritime Naval Society Agency had established in Batumi. The cargo turnover of the port has revived significantly, the agricultural life of Batumi has started to flourish and as a result, Batumi Port was Gradually converting into a "Russian Port". It incrementally attracted the transit of the Caucasus, while the Russian Consul in Trabzon - Mashnin eagerly recommended the government to buy the port of Batumi.

ANALYSIS

The Russian-Turkish war from 1877-1878 ended in a victory for Russia, which consequently served the interests of the Security of Russia's southern border and unlimited domination of the Russian capital. On February 18th, 1878, under the Treaty of San Stefano, Russia gained a monetary contribution and, in addition, Artaan, Bayazet, Batumi, and Kars.

Emperor Alexander II declared that "Batumi and Kars alone are worth it for Russia to sacrifice several millions" At that point, England demanded a revision of the terms of the truce or otherwise threatened with war. The tsarist regime was forced to make concessions.¹

During the preparation period for the Congress, the Russian government has mandated the rulers of the Caucasus to characterize the annexed territories, just to be sure whether the fight for Batumi was worth it or not. Various opinions and perspectives were discussed. The majority of them recognized and admitted the economic and strategic importance of this region for the Russian Empire. The newspaper "Kavkaz" wrote that "By the means of gaining possession over Batumi, Russia will dominate the Black Sea, England's trade with Persia will have interfered and this will be the initial point towards the Suez Canal".

From June 18th to July 13th, 1878, was held the Berlin Congress. Russia ceded Macedonia to the Ottomans and the town of Bayazet in Asia Minor. Regardless of opposing views, the Russian delegation managed to maintain possession of Batumi at the Berlin Congress. Batumi was handed over to Russia with the status of a free port city or Porto-Franco.

Porto-Franco is an Italian word for a seaside port that has granted the right to receive and export local and foreign goods duty-free. Above mentioned right extends to a defined area of the port, isolated from the rest of the city with a customs border and is called the district of Porto-Franco. There are warehouses in the Porto-Franco quarter where goods are received, sorted, packed, and sent to the points where there are the most profitable conditions for their sale. The first Porto-Franco was established in 1547, in Livorno, Italy. Then in 1595 in Genoa, in 1661 in Vienna, in 1664 in Altin, in 1669 in Marseilles, in 1706 in Gibraltar, in 1727 in Hamburg, in 1824 in Brumen, in 1833 in Lübeck. From 1817 to 1859, Odessa became a free port city, and, in 1862, so did Vladivostok. The third city in the Russian Empire with the status of Porto-Franco was Batumi. By the resolution of the Congress of Berlin, Batumi had passed to Russia on August 25th, 1878. The development of the new status of the city has been completed by October of the same year. Batumi has become a trade-warehouse centre where European goods could only be traded in the Porto-Franco area. The city had four customs gates: 1. Ozurgeti - towards Kobuleti-Guria; 2. Kakhaberi - towards Keda-Khulo; 3. Chorokhi - towards Borchkha-Artvin; 4. at the end of Chorokhi, via Gonio-Sarpi road to Kars-Trabzon. At that time, the owner of any goods was obliged to pay the imposed duty or tax. On October 20th, 1878, the

¹ Komakhidze 2010, 39.

commission, with the signature of the Director of the Porto-Franco Department, the Head of the Transit Customs, and the Military Governor of the Batumi District, finally determined the boundaries and territory of the free trade zone. It started from the river Bartskhanistskali and ended at the river Mejinistskali, and covered an area of two thousand desetina overall.²

The free port in Batumi had officially opened on October 28th, 1878. The administration consisted of Dmitry Bikov, the warehouse customs manager; Ivan Eristavi and Petre Lobar, members; treasurer - Ivan Efremov; secretary - Leonard Chaevsky; translators; warehouse supervisors; ship supervisors; head of quarantine – D. Tsurinov; head of the quarantine port Petre Potskhverashvili. During 1879, 1880, and 1881, numerous Russian, Austrian, French, Turkish, and English ships loaded with various goods arrived in the port of Batumi. When they sailed away, they took from Batumi lots of different goods, such as wool, raw cotton, silk cocoon, leather, timber, fur, manganese, carpets, corn, wheat, etc.

Particularly after the launch of the Batumi-Samtredia railway, the cargo turnover of the port was increasing day by day. Batumi port has become a convenient, well-equipped, and safe one. The port's cargo turnover was also raised by Baku's oil exports. In 1881, 926405 feet of oil products were exported through the port. Meanwhile, in March 1883, the construction of the Batumi-Samtredia railway has been completed, so Batumi was directly connected to Baku via the Poti-Tbilisi highway. Thus, it has become the main centre for exporting the oil from Baku. People from all over the empire flocked to Batumi en masse. The influx of so many people at once made living conditions more expensive. Batumi became the centre of attention of foreign merchants and industrialists. The large and small, major and minor financial magnates, as for example Mantashev, Rothschild, and Nobel, were established here. Consulates of about 20 foreign countries, defending the interests of their citizens were opened in the city.³

Intensive construction was in full swing in the city. Residential houses that were built, and also four tobacco factories, eight hotels, four confectioneries, 21 canteens, 15 haberdasheries, and 12 clothing and footwear stores were opened.

In 1883, Rothschild's Bungi and Palashovsky plant for the production of kerosene had been launched. In 1885 the enterprise of Sidirid and Richter has been launched. Swamps began to dry up, streets had improved, water was withdrawn and the port was expanded. Consequently, authorities introduced complete isolation by customs quarantine and strict military regime to enforce Porto-Franco

The initiation of such an artificial barrier made trade between villages and the city more complicated. Stock purchased for selling outside the Porto-Franco area was often inspected at so-called quarantines. Inspections frequently led to fines and confiscation of the goods in case of smuggling and had caused great dissatisfaction among the people.

The population began to go into exile, as Muhajirs. Davit Kldiashvili had described the situation when he wrote: "There were guard posts around the city during the times of "Porto-Franco" and every passer-by was searched. People were bothered by numberless acts of injustice and harassment from the guards. Subsequently, the living conditions of the local population had gone downhill. Those who were already distrustful of the Russian government, while finding it unacceptable to tolerate artificial obstacles, preferred to be migrated to the Ottoman Empire".

The government officials were less concerned about the situation. They could not tolerate the fact that the Porto-Franco could not meet their interests, the use of Batumi as a military base, and they could not bear the economic rivalry of the British (and Europeans in general) in the Transcaucasia. On June 27, 1886, the tsarist regime had ceased the existence of the Porto-Franco of Batumi. This fact had massive feedback within the 19th century Georgian press. In their responses, Ilia Chavchavadze, Niko Nikoladze, and Sergi Meskhi criticized the Porto-Franco of Batumi, and they disliked the organizational principle of its arrangement and the subsequent negative events overall.⁴

The press also focused on the distribution of smuggled goods and the dismissal of customs officials. According to the words of Ilia Chavchavadze, "Porto-Franco" has lasted beneficial for only a few traders

² Surguladze, Sioridze 1996, 37.

³ Lekveishvili 2000, 41.

⁴ Akhvlediani 1957, 79.

and for its citizens only. We should happily celebrate the abolishment of "Porto Franco", as it was just an empty title and not a benefit for the Country, such a statute of Batumi was unable to play any actual role for colonial Georgia, so if we consider the case of this repeal within the interests of our country, we can easily state that nor "Porto-Franco" carried any actual benefits for us and nor its abolition will bring us any loss". Thus, the annulment of "Porto Franco" was appreciated by the Georgian society.

Batumi was developing at a fast pace. It represented the main transit centre of the Caucasus. The main subject of export was petroleum products. International trade with the Batumi port was carried out by shipping companies and societies, and in 1913 their number was more than thirty. Its essential part has consisted of English, French, and German shipping companies. Thereafter, the beginning of the First World War closed the Black Sea canals, and the economic life of the port of Batumi was disrupted.

The opening of the Caucasian Front on November 2nd, 1914, had turned Batumi into a military destination point. Political problems came to the foreground in the Georgian society. The national issue has become one of more actuality. Through the Treaty of Brest, Soviet Russia handed over the districts of Batumi, Kars, and Artaan to the Ottomans in 1918. Afterward, the Ottomans took advantage of the political crisis and occupied Batumi during March and April of the same year, however, on October 30th, 1918, the Treaty of Mudros had been signed, forcing them to withdraw their troops from Batumi. Thus, the Ottomans had been replaced by England. The city had aroused. The European trading and industrial companies (such as Norton & Gregory, Levant, CIB Union) have had especially attracted by Baku oil, Chiatura manganese ore, local cotton, and wool. The active traffic of ships between Batumi and Europe had been restored; however, it also should be noted that the Entente countries could not tolerate the sole influence of England in Batumi and they were trying to expand their rights and possibilities. That consequently led to delaying the solution of the Batumi problem by European diplomats in the first half of 1920.

The idea of declaring Batumi as a free city port was initiated in Italian governmental circles. Their task implied imposing control of the allied countries over Batumi port, customs, and railway. The military government of Batumi district was established, which should have had three battalions, several squadrons, and Radio-telegraph. The idea of introducing Porto-Franco in Batumi also matured in the British government. The Entente countries found it hard to agree on spheres of influence after the end of the First World War, Transcaucasia and Batumi were also disputed. According to the American General George Mosdo's opinion, Batumi had to be converted into the military base of the United States in the Transcaucasia. The French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was displeased with the British presence in Batumi and Baku. The issue of Batumi at the Paris Peace Conference was acute and disputed harshly, while in February 1920, even the British government itself also raised the issue of the evacuation of the British troops from Batumi.

The French General Berthelot declared that "The Government of France substantially agrees with the opinion of the British delegation, that it is undesirable to evacuate troops from Batumi and leaving it as booty for Georgia, Turkey, and other allies. Batumi Free Port was the general concern of all allies, so it has to enter under the protection of the League of Nations". According to Berthelot's position, three battalions would be sufficient enough for the defence of Batumi. France was ready to send one battalion. Italy's position towards Batumi is also interesting after Francesco Nitti came to power in 1919, as the perspectives towards the Batumi issue have changed. He stated that "Whereas he takes into account the great importance of the port, he is willing to make sacrifices and provide one battalion, as Italy's contribution to the creation of the United Garrison".⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The Supreme Council of the Allies decided to declare Batumi Porto-Franco with a mandate from the League of Nations and to position three battalions of England, France, and Italy there. However, Porto-Franco was not a single subject to be discussed in London on February 25th, but the idea of "creating a miniature independent state" in Batumi and the surrounding area was considered in addition. The next day the Allies discussed the draft project of the British Commander-in-Chief George Millin, regarding the borders of Batumi city-state, which should cover an area within a radius of sixteen versts. The borders

⁵ Komakhidze 2010, 48.

were positioned along the river Chorokhi in the south, the village of Bobokvati in the north, Adjaristskali in the east and Khertvisi plateau above the Chorokhi confluence.

Consequently, the discussion of the suggested intentions led to an argument among the members of the Boundary Commission, since conflicting opinions arose instantly, revealing a sharp controversy towards the subject of matter. One may consider out of question the fact, above mentioned matter of contention certainly was the most crucial point for the whole country, while at a time not only already obscure future of Batumi was uncertain, but also was Georgia's future too. On May 11th, the Cabinet of the British Government decided to withdraw the garrison from Batumi. On June 28th, a definitive agreement was signed with the Government of Georgia. On July 7th, Batumi was practically handed over to the Democratic Republic of Georgia. On July 9th, the British and French troops left Batumi; nevertheless, the Supreme Council of Allied Nations has not revoked the Porto-Franco status of Batumi formally. Batumi, as well as Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, and Trabzon, would remain as a free port of international importance, supported by the mandate of the League of Nations. However, the Treaty of Sevres was rejected by the Kemalist government which nullified it formally at the Lazistan Conference (1922-1923).

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