

დემოგრაფია ♦ სოციალური პოლიტიკა DEMOGRAPHY ♦ SOCIAL POLICY

Ethno-Demographic Processes and Ethnic Conflicts in Georgia

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In the 1990s, the ethnic conflicts incited by Russia were directed against the secession and formation of Georgia from the Soviet Empire as an independent state. The negative consequences of these ethnic conflicts still have a negative impact on Georgia. The purpose of writing this paper was to investigate whether the ongoing ethno-demographic processes in Georgia were one of the causes of the conflict. For this purpose, based on the historical and modern statistical information related to the problem, we have established that the ongoing ethno-demographic processes in Georgia from the 19th to the 1990s cannot be the cause of ethno-conflicts. Historically, the population of Abkhazian and Ossetian nationalities lived in a better demographic situation than Georgians. According to the latest statistics of 1959-1979 years, Georgians were characterized by low birth rates and high mortality rates compared to Abkhazians and Ossetians, which led to a high natural increase in them compared to Georgians. Due to the demographic situation, Georgians had more conflict situation. It is clear that neither Abkhazians nor Ossetians had limited their demographic development. Consequently, ethno-demographic processes could not be the cause of ethnic conflicts. These conflicts were not ethno-conflicts. This was Russia's aggression against Georgia's state independence. After the 2008 military conflict between Russia and Georgia, Russia openly occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, which is still under the control of Russia.

Keywords: Ethnic statistics; censuses; natural increase; ethno-demographic processes; ethnic conflicts

JEL Codes: J11, J15, D74

Introduction

The climax of Georgia's struggle for independence in the early 1990s seemingly coincided with the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian confronta-

tion, later transformed into the armed conflicts undoubtedly inspired by Russia. The conflicts brewing since the 1920s, the time when the USSR emerged and the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and Autonomous Region of South Ossetia were established by the Kremlin. It was those “time bombs” that Russia activated in the early 1990s. The conflicts caused a lot of suffering to all the parties involved: thousands of casualties, widespread destruction and the internal migration of the scale never seen before. The ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia forced approx. 200 000 Georgians to leave the region, with most of them remaining the IDPs. As to South Ossetia, no fewer than 7 000 Georgians were driven out. There are no Georgians in the town of Tskhinvali now. According to the 1989 census, a few years before the conflict, 98.8 thousand Ossetians had lived outside the Autonomous Region of Ossetia all across Georgia. The 2002 census made it evident that merely 38 000 Ossetians permanently resided outside the “Autonomous Region”, which means that 60.8 thousand Ossetians left their permanent place of residence or concealed their nationality in the census.

The situation with the Abkhazians was different: according to the 1989 and 2002 censuses, the number of the Abkhazians residing outside Abkhazia, all across Georgia went up from 2.7 thousand to 3.5 thousand or 130.0%. (The Ethnic Makeup of the Georgian Population.1991. 6,10), (Results of the 2002 Census of the Georgian Population. 2003.110). Remaining true to its “good-neighborly” relations, violating the International Law, Russia recognized Georgia’s two break-away regions as independent states, deployed its military bases there and actually occupied 20% of the Georgian territory. In the wake of its military aggression against Georgia in August 2008, Moscow fenced the former Autonomous Region of South Ossetia with barbed wire turning it into a kind of concentration camp for the Ossetians and Georgian still remaining there. It should be said that as a result of the 2008 armed conflict, 26 000 Georgians of the Akhalkgori area neighboring Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) had to leave, too.

The Objective and Methodology of the Study

The demographic processes underway in the country affect its economy, social situation and interethnic relations. Our aim is to find out whether the ethnical and demographic processes had stirred, among others, the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s, whether Georgia’s demographic policy had had an adverse effect on the demographic situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The statistical methods, such as the absolute and relative values, temporal (dynamic) series, average values, variation indicator and the growth rates form the methodological grounds of the study. Also, the study relies on the censuses and registration of the natural movement of the population. There are references to the relevant statistical, demographic and historical publications.

Results

The historical sources say that the Georgians had always been the largest ethnic group in Abkhazia. From 1800 up to the conflict of the 1990, Georgia was a Russian colony and, therefore, Russia would not have allowed the Georgians to pursue the demographic policy discriminatory to the Abkhazians. On the contrary, the demographic policy the Russian Empire pursued in Abkhazia was nothing short of genocide. See table 1.

The Number of the Population of the Parties Involved in the Conflict Based on the Censuses in Georgia (Antadze K. 1973, 88)

Table 1

	1801	1864	1886	1897	Growth
Georgians	670	955	1188	1314	By 1,96
Ossetians	32	49	76	85	By 2,65
Abkhazians	60	66	35	40	By 0,67

It is evident that within the period indicated in the table, the number of the Georgians in Georgia nearly doubled, that of the Ossetians went up by 2.65, while the number of Abkhazians diminished by 33%.

It should be taken into account that in 1801-1897, rapid growth of certain ethnic groups (the Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians) in Georgia, despite increased absolute numbers, resulted in shrinking the Georgians from 79% to 70%, that of the Abkhazians from 7% to 2.1% and conversely that of the Ossetians hiked from 3.7 to 4.6% of the total population. 1864-1886 were disastrous to the Abkhazians. According to the 1886 census, there were merely 3 Abkhazians, a woman and two men in Sokhumi, the future capital of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The Georgians remained the largest ethnic group (Totadze A. 1994. 11). Within the discussed period of time, the number of the Abkhazians nearly halved: from 66 000 it decreased to 35000. Was it because of the Georgians? Definitely not. The actual reason was their forced emigration to Turkey (Muhacir) by the Russian Empire. After the Russians put down the peasants' uprising in 1866, 15 thousand Abkhazians were exiled to Turkey. During Russia-Turkey war of 1877-1878, namely in 1877 for alleged sympathizing with the Turks, 28.5 thousand Abkhazians were exiled from the Sokhumi district to Turkey, while in 1878, approx. 2.6 thousand Abkhazians migrated from Ajara region to Turkey (Antadze K. 1973. 83, 138,139); (Jaoshvili V. 1996. 89). The Russian Imperial rulers put the Abkhazians on the black list and barred not only from Sokhumi but its surroundings as well. Owing to the Georgian public figures' protest against discrimination of the Abkhazians, who they regarded as their kinsmen, some of them were later allowed to come back to Georgia.

However, it was not only Russia but Turkey as well that were keen about emigration of the Abkhazians. Russia wanted to get rid of the freedom-loving mountainous peoples in order to gain foothold in the geostrategically important Caucasus and change the demographic balance there by resettlement of Cossacks, Russians etc. loyal peoples and those proved to be loyal indeed: a century later, in 1990s, they fought against the Georgians in the Moscow-instigated conflicts.

As to Turkey, its goal was to increase the number of the population dwindling as a result of the long drawn-out wars. Thus, the two acted hand-in-hand. But what about the Georgians, who suffered all kinds of discrimination, including demographic on the part of the Russian Empire.

Forced emigration of the Abkhazians to Turkey in 1866-1878, left a number of villages nearly vacated allowing the Russians to resettle the people they regarded loyal, predominantly the Armenian and Greek migrants from Turkey, who favored the town of Sokhumi, Gagra, Gulripshi and the surrounding area. Apart from them, the Russian Empire resettled the ethnic Russians and Estonians. Albeit in smaller numbers, the Georgians from Samegrelo and Svaneti regions neighboring Abkhazia were also allowed to settle there. According to the 1897 census in the Russian Empire, 8 000 out of the total residents of the Sokhumi district had been born abroad and 6.4 000 in Georgia. (Jaoshvili V. 1984. 91).

In the late XIX c., Mr. Ivan Khatsov, who in 1885-1883, held the high office of the head of the Department of State Properties and Agriculture in the Caucasus masterminded immigration of the Armenians and the Greek to the Black Sea coast asserting that they were accustomed to the malaria-stricken places, would dewater the marshes and make the territory fit for the prospected Russian settlers. He argued that if the Russians accustomed to a different climate and species of wheat were resettled first, they would die of fever. Khatsov proved to be persuasive enough to have a significant number of Armenians resettled not only in Abkhazia, but Borchalo and Javakheti regions as well (Antadze K. 1973. 110,111).

With the sole goal of proving that the Abkhazians had always been the native population of Abkhazia, the Abkhazian authors of our times (Sh. Inal-Ipa, S. Lakoba, B. Ashba) intentionally exaggerate the scope of Muhacir: the initial figures spoke of 30 000 forced migrants, later this number was doubled and eventually hit 400 000 (Totadze A. 1993. 64, 65); (Totadze A, 1994. 9, 10); (Totadze A. 1999. 218, 219), which is incredible. However, it is an undisputed fact that the Georgian had always been the largest ethnic group in Abkhazia. See table 2.

The Census-Based Numbers of the Abkhazians and Georgians In Abkhazia (in thousands)

Table 2

Years	1886	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989
Georgians	34,8	44,9	72,0	92,0	158,2	199,6	213,3	239,8
Abkhazians	28,3	39,6	51,5	56,2	61,2	77,3	83,1	93,3

It is clear that in XX c., the number of the Abkhazians grew steadily as a result of their natural movement.

However, since 1926, the share of the Abkhazians shrunk compared to the other ethnic groups. Similarly to the Abkhazians, the number of the Georgians in Georgia slashed, too as a result of the immigration from the rest of the USSR. In 1939 the Georgians made up 61.4% of the total population, the lowest statistics in the history (Khmaladze M. 1995. 377).

In 1926-1989, the number of the Abkhazians in Abkhazia grew from 51.5 thousand to 93.3 thousand, i.e. by 1.8. However, contrary to the other ethnic groups, their proportion went down from 25.6% to 17.8%. Namely, the number of the Georgians in Abkhazia grew by 3.3, while their share in the total population – from 35.8% to 45.7%. The growth of the other relatively large ethnic groups was noticeable, as well: the number of the Armenians in Abkhazia trebled from 25.7 thousand to 76.5 thousand (300%), so did their share in the total population: 1.6% - 15.1%, i.e. by 9.4 times. The number of the Russians at the time grew six-fold from 12.5 to 74.9 thousand and instead of 1.8%, they made up 14.3% (the growth by 7.9 times). Evidently, both in the absolute and relative terms, the Russian population of Abkhazia grew faster than either the Abkhazians or Georgians, while although the number of the Armenians was a little smaller than that of the Georgians, but their share in the total population was larger. The ethnic Armenians outpaced the Abkhazians significantly both in terms of the absolute and relative growth. The Abkhazian scientists seem to have “failed to notice” the dynamics of the ethnic makeup of the Autonomous Republic. Even if no Georgians had lived there, the Abkhazians’ share in the total population would have been 24.8% instead of 15.1% in 1959, 26.8% instead of 15.9% in 1970, 30.5% instead of 17.1% in 1979 and 32.7% instead of 17.8% in 1989 [calculated 7, pp. 6, 7], which means that they would have been a minority anyway.

The Russian Empire’s attitude to the Ossetians was totally different. They were placed in the favorable situation since as against the Abkhazians, they were totally loyal. While in 1800, there were 29.3 thousand Ossetians in Georgia, according to the 1989 census, i.e. in the run-up to the conflict, their number grew

5.6 times to reach 164 thousands, that of the Abkhazians grew 1.6 times - from 60 thousand to 95.8 thousand across Georgia. In 1800-1989, the Ossetians outpaced the Abkhazians 3.5 times (5,6: 1,6= 3,5).

In 1989, the population of the former South Ossetian Autonomous region was 65 thousand people 31.5 thousand out of which, i.e. approx. the total population lived in the capital Tskhinvali (The Ethnic Makeup of the Georgian Population. Statistics. 1991. 10,11)

Incidentally, the name Tskhinvali originates from the Georgian word "Rtskhila" (hornbeam). In the chronicles, Tskhinvali was first mentioned as a settlement in 1344 and as a town in 1392. There were no Ossetians in Tskhinvali up until XX c., as the household list (the census) of 1986 makes it evident. According to the census of the Georgian urban areas, in 1922 there lived 613 Ossetians and 1436 Georgians in Tskhinvali. However, immediately after creation of the so-called Autonomous Region of South Ossetia in 1922, the number of the Ossetians in Tskhinvali (proclaimed the regional capital) started growing rapidly.

In 1926, there lived 11521 Ossetians (approx. twice as many as in 1922) and 1920 Georgians in Tskhinvali. However, in just 15 years from creation of the autonomy, the Ossetians became a larger ethnic group than the Georgians, whom they outpaced 2.7 (12,4 thousand : 4,6 thousand = 2,7) times according to the 1959 census and according to the 1989 census 4.7 times (31,5 thousand : 6,9 thousand = 4,7). As a result of the ethnic cleansing, no Georgians remain in the ancient Georgian town of Tskhinvali today (Totadze A. 1999. 274); (The Ethnic Makeup of the Georgian Population. Statistics. 1991. 10,11); (Totadze A. 2006. 33).

The question arises: had the Georgians been placed in a favorable position in terms of the natural movement of the population (birth and mortality rates, natural increase)? To answer the question we calculated the statistical data related to the natural movement in terms of the ethnic groups. We relied on the Soviet statistics, which could not have been biased in favor of the Georgians or against the Ossetians or Abkhazians.

Let's start with the infant (up to 1 year) mortality, i.e. the number of the newborns out of 1000, who did not reach their 1 birthday. We computed that in 1970, the number looked like this: among the Abkhazians - 8.9; Ossetians - 22.0; Georgians - 22.78. The numbers in 1980 looked like this: 12.0; 18.6 and 25.1 (respectively) (Khmaladze M. 1995.161). In 1980, mortality of female Abkhazians infants in the rural areas of Abkhazia was merely 2.4, the smallest number across the world to date (Khmaladze M. 1995.161). It's clear enough that the Georgians' position in terms of demography was far from favorable.

In 1959-1979, as against the Abkhazians and Ossetians, the Georgians had a negative birth and mortality rates balance, hence the high natural increase of the two ethnic groups. See Table 3.

Rate of Natural Increase per 1000 People in 1959-1979 (Khmaladze M. 1995. 307)

Table 3

	1959	1970	1979
Georgians	15,6	11,9	9,4
Abkhazians	19,8	17,7	10,7
Ossetians	20,7	15,3	11,8
Average in Georgia	17,2	11,9	9,6
Linear coefficient of variation %%	15,0	26,0	13,0

If someone is to have a grudge, it is the Georgians for among the parties involved in the conflict they had had the lowest natural increase of the population. As a result of drastic reduction of the Georgians' natural growth in 1959-1970, its overall differentiation ratio, i.e. linear coefficient of variation went up from 15% to 26% and in 1970-1979, went down to 13%, while in fact remaining at the 1959 level.

The conclusions regarding the demographic processes in the Gori region neighboring the former South Ossetia are likewise (Akhalaia N. 2009. 120-127). Because of the escalating tensions, the demographic data on the Abkhazians and Ossetians have been unavailable since 1989.

Undoubtedly, the growth of the Abkhazian and Ossetian populations had not been restricted, so it cannot have been the reason behind the conflicts, which by definition were not ethnic. Actually they represented Russia's aggression against Georgia's independence. Moscow leveraged both ethnic groups and after the 2008 armed conflict occupied both regions.

Conclusion

The anti-Abkhazian policy pursued by the Russian Empire, especially so their exile (Muhacir) to Turkey in the late XIX c. made a negative impact on the Abkhazians' demographic situation: in 1864-1897, from 66 thousand, the Abkhazian went down to 40 thousand. As against this, from the early XX c., the Abkhazian population started growing and in 1897-1989 it expanded 2.4 times.

Contrary to the Abkhazians, the Ossetians have always been totally loyal to the Russian Empire, hence their favorable position. Consequently, in 1800-1989, the number of the Ossetians in Georgian increased 5.6 times, i.e. they outpaced the Abkhazians 3.5 times (5,6 : 2,4 ; 3,5). As a result of the conflicts, the Georgians were forced to leave Abkhazia. The same is true for the Ossetians living outside Tskhinvali region, i.e. the rest of Georgia. The study makes it evident that it was not the demographic processes underway in Georgia that had stirred the conflicts and the resulting forced migration of the populations as the two ethnic groups enjoyed a favorable position compared to the Georgians.

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1990-იანი წლების დასწყისში ხუსეთის მიეხ ინსპიხიხებული ეთნოკონფლიქტები მიმახთუდი იყო საბჭოთა იმპეხიიდან საქაიხთვედოს დამოუკიდებელ სახელმწიფოდ გამოყოფის და ჩამოყადიბების წინააღმდეგ. აღნიშნუდი ეთნოკონფლიქტების ნეგატიუხი შედეგები დღესაც უაიყოფით გავდენას ახდენს საქაიხთვედოზე. აღნიშნუდი ნაშომის დაწეხის მიზანი იყო გამოგვეკვდია, ხომ აი წაიმოადგენდა საქაიხთვედოში მიმდინაიე ეთნოდემოგრაფიუდი პროცესები კონფლიქტების ეიხთ-ეიხთ მიზეზს. ამ მიზნით, პრობლემასთან დაკავშირებულ ისგოიხუდ და თანამედეხოვე სტატისტიკუი ინფოხმაციაზე დაყიხდნობით დავადგინეთ, ხომ XIX საუკუნიდან 1990-იან წლებამდე, საქაიხთვედოში მიმდინაიე ეთნოდემოგრაფიუდი პროცესები აი შეიძლება გამხდაიყო ეთნოკონფლიქტების მიზეზი. ისგოიხუდად, აფხაზი და ოსი ეიხოვნებების მოსახლეობა ქაიხთვედებთან შედაიებით უკეთეს დემოგრაფიულ ვითაიებაში ცხოვრობდა. უკანასკნედი 1959-1979 წლების სტატისტიკით ქაიხთვედებისთვის დამახასიათებედი იყო შობადობის დაბადი და მოკვდაობის მაღადი დონე აფხაზებთან და ოსებთან შედაიებით, იაც განაპიხოებდა ამ უკანასკნელთა მაღად

ბუნებრივ მატებას ქაჩთვევებთან შედარებით. დემოგრაფიული ვითარებიდან გამომდინარე, საკონფლიქტო სიტუაცია უფრო ქაჩთვევებს გვექონდა. ცხადია, რომ ახც აფხაზების, ახც ოსების დემოგრაფიული განვითარების შეზღუდვა ახ ხდებოდა. შესაბამისად, ეთნოდემოგრაფიული პოლემიკები ვეი გახდებოდა ეთნოკონფლიქტების მიზეზი. აღნიშნული კონფლიქტები ეთნოკონფლიქტები ახ იყო. ეს იყო ხუსეთის მიეი საქაჩთვედოს სახედმწიფოებხივი დამოუკიდებლობის წინააღმდეგ მიმართული აგხესია, ხისთვისაც გამოიყენეს აფხაზი და ოსი ეხი, ხოლო 2008 წედს ხუსეთ-საქაჩთვედოს სამხედრო კონფლიქტის შემდეგ ღიად მოახდინეს აფხაზეთის და ცხინვადის ხეგიონების ოკუპაცია, რომედისც დღესაც გხძედება ხუსეთის მიეი მავთუდხდაჩთების გავდებით.

საკვანძო სიგყვები: ეთნიკური სტატისტიკა, მოსახდობის აღწეხები, ბუნებხივიმატება, ეთნოდემოგრაფიული პოლემიკები, ეთნოკონფლიქტები.

JEL Codes: J11, J15, D74