

# *Eastern Crisis and Georgia*

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## **Abstract**

*The Eastern crisis is an early issue. It is based on the clash of interests of the great powers in the territories of Southeast Europe. Its return to the nineteenth century came due to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the resistance of the peoples who were under this empire, as well as the growing interests of the great powers of Europe. Germany appeared in the Near and Middle East, which affected the interests of France, Britain and Russia. It entered into agreements with Austria-Hungary, Italy and then Turkey, while France made alliances with England, Russia and the United States. Under the Treaty of Kainarja, the Ottoman Empire was forced to relinquish part of its possessions. With this treaty, Russia for the first time secured significant territorial gains, which provided it with access to the Black Sea. These would then inevitably lead to its empowerment. Georgia in this period was a battlefield according to the interests of the Ottoman, Russian and Persian empires, but also of other great powers, such as Britain, France, etc. A series of Russo-Turkish wars for territory took place. Behind them, what benefited most, was Russia, which annexed Georgia, while Turkey Islamized the population of the lands in possession, part of which later emigrated to the Ottoman Empire.*

**Keywords:** *Eastern Crisis, Georgia, Russia, Great Powers, treaties and agreements, war*

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## **I. Introduction**

Europe has been facing the Eastern Crisis or the Eastern Question since ancient times. Over the centuries its essence has not changed, but, from time to time, it has acquired different aspects. At the root of this crisis lies the clash in the territories of Southeast Europe between the customs, ideas and prejudices of East and West. Scholars find traces of it in the Greco-Persian conflict, marked by the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae or Salamis. In Roman times this issue was represented by the conflict of the Hellenic monarchies, in the Middle Ages by the war between Islam and Christianity, the culmination of which was the battle of Tours (October 732) or otherwise the battle of Poitiers (Poitiers). which saved Western Europe from invasion and Islamization. The issue is renewed with the crusades of the West, which manifest the rivalry between the Cross and the Crescent.

## **II. The resurgence of the eastern crisis**

In the nineteenth century, the essence of the Eastern crisis became the presence of a very important factor in Europe, the Ottoman power, which, according to J. A. R. Mariott (1917), was imposed on several issues:

- a) first, its passage of the Hellespont (Dardanelles) in the middle of the fourteenth century;
- b) second, the position of the Balkan states, such as Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania (which appeared gradually as the Ottoman influx slowed down), Montenegro or Bosnia, Herzegovina, Transylvania and Bukovina, which were annexed by the Habsburgs. ;
- c) third, the problem of the Black Sea, the entry and exit from it, the command of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and, above all, the main problem of the conquest of Constantinople;
- d) fourth, Russia's position in Europe, its natural impulse towards the Mediterranean, its repeated efforts to secure permanent access to that sea from the straits, its connection with its fellow-believers under the influence of the sultan, in particular with them with Slavic nationalities;
- e) fifth, the position of the Habsburg Empire, in particular, its anxiety about access to the Aegean and its relations, on the one hand, with the southern Slavs in the provinces of Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as with the nearby kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro and, on the other hand, with the Romanians of Transylvania and with Bukovina;

- f) finally, the attitude of the European powers in general and of England in particular, towards all or any of the issues listed above.

U. Trumpener (1968) states that the emergence of imperial Germany in the the Near East and the Middle East further aggravated the rivalry of the great powers for that region. The newly formed German Reich, on the other hand, was trying to get involved in the “Eastern Question”, the armaments industry had successfully competed with the sultan’s traditional suppliers and had become an important supplier in Constantinople, on the other hand, industrial and financial consortia had secured markets or concessions and spheres of influence in the territory of the Empire, even Kaiser himself, Wilhelm II, had traveled twice to the Ottoman Empire. These developments had fueled the desire to increase German influence, especially the Pan-German League speaking openly of the need to expand German influence in the Ottoman Empire. All this had raised the suspicions of France, Britain and Russia, to whom this fruitful Ottoman-German relationship threatened the interests they had in the region. This protagonism of Germany in the Near East and the Middle East had considerably increased the frictions in Russia’s relations with Britain and less so with France.

Germany entered into agreements with Austria-Hungary and Italy, which were later joined by Turkey. France opposed the alliance over the Alsace-Lorraine affair, and in response allied itself with Britain, Russia, and the United States. Russia, still weak, hoped to use the alliance of which it was a part to achieve Constantinople and control of the Dardanelles. G. Agoston and B. A. Masters (2009) think that the origins of the “Eastern Question” can be traced back to 1774, when the Russo-Turkish War (1768-74) ended with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, whose fate was decided with the Treaty of Little Kainarja, in 1774. The Russo-Ottoman War (1768-1774) gave the Russian Empire of Catherine II the possibility of a military expedition to the Caucasus and Crimea, in order to put an end to Ottoman legal claims in the Caucasus. The Crimean Khanate was a vassal of the Ottoman Empire and with the Treaty of Little Kainarja, in 1774 became independent. The treaty defined the Cuban River as the new Ottoman-Russian border.

The Treaty of Kainarja is one of the most important treaties of European diplomacy, as through it the Ottoman Empire was forced to relinquish part of its possessions. In addition to the Cuban area, he also left Terek, which until then was the vassal khanate of Crimea under Ottoman rule. Turkey also liberated the port of Azov at the mouth of the Don along with the fortresses of Kerç and Yenikala, which controlled the straits joining the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. An important victory for Russia was a small area between the Bug and Dnieper rivers, along with the latter’s gorge. So, with this treaty, Russia gained for the first time a land, albeit small, that provided access to the Black Sea. These were very

significant territorial benefits for Russia, but not the most important achievement of the treaty, as it aimed to have freedom of navigation for its ships in the Black Sea, which until then had been closed to non-Turkish ships since the late 16th century, as and the right of its merchant ships to navigate freely through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. The treaty provided for Russia's right to build an Orthodox church in Constantinople, and a secret article forced the Turkish government to pay a reparation of four and a half million rubles. (J. A. R. Marriott, 1917)

The terms of this treaty were humiliating and catastrophic for the Turks. Russian territorial gains, war reparations, the construction of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople, the free navigation of Russian merchants in the Black Sea could have more serious implications, as they severely damaged Turkish honor and, no doubt, would provoke similar requests from Western European countries. All of this would inevitably lead to the great empowerment of Russia. Although it had managed to expand the territory where it would exercise its authority, Russia, dissatisfied with this border (the Cuban River), annexed Crimea in 1783. This decision was not a surprise, but the High Gate's failure to react immediately.

Then there were other agreements, which regulated the situations between them and determined the outcome of the wars: the Ainali Kavak Convention between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1779, the sende of Sultan of 1783 and the hattisheff of 1802, which confirmed and fulfilled the provisions of Little Kainarja. Eventually, there were some agreements reached between the great powers, including territorial compensation at the expense of others, especially Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 or, as in the case of Wallachia, in some cases simply foreseen. (I. Biliarsky et al. 2012)

### **III. Georgia in the period of the eastern crisis**

The fate of Georgia was linked to the so-called "Eastern Question" from the middle of 1760-1802. G. Agoston and B. A. Masters (2009) write: "The first Eastern Question was invented at the Congress of Vienna (1815) by Russian delegates to describe the growing tensions between the Ottoman sultan and his Greek subjects, this phrase gained popularity during the 19th century, as diplomats debated the fate of the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In short, the "Eastern Question" revolves around the question of how to eliminate the vacuum in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Southern Europe and the modern Middle East, which was created with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the partition of Poland, without damaged the delicate balance of power in Europe. There is no consensus among historians as to when the "Eastern Question" arose, or when - or even if - it was resolved. "Diplomatic circles in the 19th century understood it as a matter of contemporary politics and tried to find the best solution." (p. 190)

According to I. Biliarsky et al. (2012), this term from European chancelleries refers to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the concern of the great powers of Europe to maintain international stability, their interests in the region, as well as to find a worthy successor to this empire. The most suitable heir would be the Russian Empire, which aimed to open up to the Black Sea and dominate its trade routes, the West, to extend its influence as far as Southern Europe, as well as to establish a base south of the Caucasus, to enable further progress in the Near East. But Russia's desire for enlargement had troubled Britain and France, who preferred to help maintain the Ottoman Empire's status quo. So, in addition to Russia's wishes, the Ottoman Empire, still powerful, had its claims on Georgia, as well as Iran, so the fate of Georgia would depend on how the "Eastern Question" would develop.

In the 19th century, Georgia became a battleground because, in addition to the old claims of the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, the Persian Empire, the interests of many other great powers, such as Britain and France, clashed, which saw Russia as dangerous. to control the waters of the Black Sea and for this reason supported the stabilization of the Ottoman Empire's position in the Balkans, the Near East and the North Sea. (W. E. D. Allen and P. Muratoff, 1953)

"The country stretching from the eastern shore of the Black Sea to the borders of Persia, on the one hand, and from the border of Turkey to the foothills of the Cirkalia Mountains, on the other, is one of the most beautiful parts of the earth. It contains the famous kingdoms of the Easy and the classic Fass, from which we have read earlier on the voyage of the strange Argos, which with the strong wind, first through the Euxine seas, held the whole course of Greece. It was divided into several principalities, three of the most important bearing the names of Mingrelia, Imereti and Georgia respectively. These places were inhabited by people whose rare beauty is proverbial all over the world. Their children, who have long been brought in large numbers to Persia and in Turkey through their relations with the people of these lands, were the means to change the tribes, initially remarkable for their ugliness, into beautiful people. and satisfactory, and nowadays the Georgians and Mingrelians are to a large extent doing for the Russian nation what their ancestors did for the followers of AlpAlsran and Timur. This righteous country and its most righteous inhabitants have for hundreds of years been a prey to all the evils that come from a system of weak and barbaric government." (R. G. Watson, 1866, p. 82)

Convinced of the support of the Western powers, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia, entered Wallachia, and on November 1, 1853, won the battle of Oltensa. The Ottoman army was no longer the Asian army of the eighteenth century, but was reformed and modernized under the care and advice of Western officers, who were engaged in the training of cadres, but also in the reorganization of the Ottoman navy and in this sense constituted a strong opponent. (W. E. D. Allen and

P. Muratoff, 1953) So, in a way, the Eastern Question can be determined by Russia's relations with Turkey. Russia had begun to show its political protagonism in Europe and, after securing power over the Black Sea, was looking for the opportunity to enter the Mediterranean. The time span from the beginning of the Russo-Turkish War to the complete annexation of Georgia by Russia is a period of war, because all powers in the region were preoccupied for self-expansion and, in cases where diplomacy failed, war was the only alternative. The Russo-Turkish war marks the longest conflict in Europe. At this time Georgia was on the agenda of diplomacy and mediation for the achievement of peace, often even under the protectorate of any of the powers, when the agreements were impossible to achieve. (J. A. R. Marriott, 1917)

Thus, in 1760 Teimuraz went to Russia, where he was received with full honors by Queen Elizabeth, but her promise to send Russian troops to Georgia was not kept, as she died in 1761 and Teimuraz could only survive for two weeks. In 1783 a treaty was signed, by which the Georgian prince renounced alliance with Persia and declared himself a vassal of Empress Catherine, who, in turn, bound herself and her followers to protect Heraclius, son of Teimuras. and to guarantee not only all the current possessions of the king of Georgia, but also of all the lands that could be acquired by him in the future. With the violation of the Treaty of Little Kainarja, Russia became a real threat to the Ottomans due to the strengthening and exit of its Fleet in the Black Sea. The invasion of Crimea, the Treaty of Georgievsk, through which he established a protectorate over the Christian kingdom of Georgia and revived the expansionist policy of Peter the Great (P. W. Schroeder, 1996), made Russia a powerful, non-violent but also European chancelleries. This move, together with the agreement that Heraclius of Georgia made with Catherine II, revived the Ottoman interest in the Caucasus, which the latter had possessed since 1475. (G. Agoston, B. A. Masters, 2009)

Russia's focus on the South Caucasus came during the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774), when Catherine II of Russia used Georgian military power, aided only by a small Russian military force, to divert Ottoman troops from Europe. Irakli had promised to take part in military operations against Turkey, on the condition that Georgia be placed under Russian protection, but the Russian commitment was not what was promised. Even during the Russo-Turkish war of 1787-1792, Russia again did not engage in the Caucasus, leaving Irakli to face the Ottomans alone. This war ended with the Treaty of Yashi, at the end of 1792. Aga Mahomed was given the opportunity to punish the Georgian rebels when Lutfali Khani, his powerful rival, was no more and when the chief of Kajar had accepted the subjugation of the southern provinces of Persia. Before deciding on the place, he summoned Irakli to return to his post, pay the usual tribute, and appear before his court to take homage and take the oath of allegiance. Irakli's response was that he did not accept any claim. (G. Agoston, B. A. Masters, 2009)

Until now, Russia's interest in Georgia was not great, also because of the problems that Russia itself had (events in Europe and Pugachev's rebellion). Interest grew with Grigory Potemkin (1739-1791), who was an advocate of Russian enlargement and pursued an active policy in Georgia, with the view of having it as a second effective front not only in the relationship between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, but even in trade with Iran and the Middle East, as Russia itself did not want to open a new war front with Iran. Even after the Georgievski Treaty (which made Georgia the formal protectorate of Russia), military engagement in Georgia was not very large and Russia did not fulfill its promises to protect Georgia from attacks. (G. Agoston and B. A. Masters, 2009) Aga Mahomedi was unwilling to relinquish his country's rights over Georgia, so, under these conditions, he gathered a large force and in the spring of 1795 set out from Tehran for Ardebeel, at the head of sixty thousand men. At Ardebeel he divided his force into three troops. One of these sent him to the plain of Moghan, in the direction of Dagestan, to specify the proper oath of allegiance by his chiefs, and to decide arrears of tribute. This force met no resistance and executed all the services required of him.

The Second Corps marched on Yerevan, a country that had accepted the authority of the Tsar of Georgia and organized its defense with fifteen thousand Georgians, under the command of Heraclius's son. The third body was led by Aga Mahomedi himself. With him he marched to take the siege of Sheeshah, a fortress near the Araks in the province of Karabakh, a place where he faced strong and sudden resistance. Failing in his efforts to reduce this fort and corrupt the loyalty of Governor Ibrahim Khaleel Khan, he simply left a force there, while he himself left to join the second corps of arms in Erivanin.

The Russians tried to influence the last Bagratid. This attempt resulted in the document of September 28, 1800 of George III, a document that caused hatred and the curse of the local nobles, because, in his name and that of his descendants, he relinquished the crown in favor of the Emperor of Russia.

R. G. Watson (1866) writes: "His queen was indignant at the weakness of her honest husband and had urged him to comply with the secret demands of the Russian agents and, when they had to arrest her in order to Moscow, the indignant princess had wounded the Russian officer who had tried to capture her. Prince Alexander, George's younger brother, was reluctant to see the crown go away from his father's family without making an effort to secure it for himself. "He tried to start a revolution, but the presidents of the country had no hope of ousting the Russian yoke without the support of Persia or Turkey." (p. 142-143)

But at the moment, neither of these two powers was interested in supporting Georgia, Persia did not want to oppose Russia, while Turkey was concerned about Napoleon's progress. The attempt he made in collaboration with Khan of Kharabag to expel Russia from Georgia was discovered in time by Tbilisi. As

punishment, Russian troops in the Caucasus massacred the modern-day city of Ganja, Elizabepol. (R. G. Watson, 1866)

King Solomon died in Trebizond in 1815, ending Imereti's troubled existence as an independent kingdom. In about three and a half years thirty kings had ascended the throne of Imereti, twenty-two of them fell (one of them, the blind Bagrat, eight times), seven died in violent death, three were blinded. (Oliver Wardrop, 1888)

Russia's annexation of Georgia strained Russian-Persian relations, the latter unable to regain the lost provinces on its own, entered into an agreement with France. The French ambassador had promised the Persian chess that any treaty to be reached between Napoleon and the Russian tsar would stipulate that the latter should return Georgia and Kharabag to Persia. But in the meantime, word spread in Tehran of a peace treaty between the two emperors (Napoleon and the Tsar of Russia), which did not provide for the return of Georgia and Kharabag to Persia.

Despite limited territorial claims in the Treaty of Edirne, at the end of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-1829, Russia owned the entire Black Sea coast, from the Danube to the Poti of Georgia. The inclusion of Ajdara and the coastal area north of Batumi (Kobuleti) in the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century led to the Islamization of the native population, becoming the ancestors of the present-day Islamic community in Georgia, but unlike Meskhetia, Adjara and Kobuleti they never abandoned the Georgian language, thus avoiding direct demographic influence. However, after the Turkish-Russian War (1877-1878) a part of this population was persuaded to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire. (R. Gachechiladze, 1995)

#### **IV. Conclusions**

The resurgence of the Eastern Crisis in the mid-1970s, with a greater sharpness than in the past, was influenced by three factors: the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of the liberation movement, and the intervention of the Great Powers. At the heart of this crisis lay the national liberation of the peoples enslaved by the Ottoman Empire and the division of the possessions of the Ottoman Empire.

Georgia in this period was a battlefield, where not only the old claims of the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire and the Persian Empire clashed, but also the interests of other European powers, such as Britain and France, which supported the stabilization of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the Middle East and the North Sea. During the Russo-Turkish war she was on the agenda of diplomacy and peace mediation.

Russian interest in Georgia grew until its annexation, straining Russian-Persian relations, and the end of the Russo-Turkish War (1828-1829) defined Russian and Turkish possessions.

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