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Formation of administrative unit and governance of Batumi District in the Russian Empire 1878-1917*

From the beginning of the 19th century, the kingdoms of Georgia were gradually conquered by the Russian Empire, at the same time, as a result of the Russo-Turkish wars, a large part of Georgian historical land and water was freed from Ottoman rule and integrated into the Russian Empire.

Therefore, Georgia became an organic part of the Russian Empire, and the system of territorial governance that was characteristic for the Russian Empire spread over Georgia. However, the state administration of the Russian Empire local bodies differed from each other according to the nature of the area of operation and forms of functioning.

This was especially striking in the opposite national regions, where there were special administrative units whose form of government was different according to local conditions. The nature of such administrative-territorial division of the imperial government towards the national parties was determined by many circumstances: the form of government in the country, the need (or absence) of political unification, relations with neighboring states, the existence of colonies or subordinate territories. Legal status of estates, etc. As a result of the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, the territory of the historical Batumi district became part of the Russian Empire, the formation of an administrative governance system began, which underwent an interesting evolution in the context of reforming the transcaucasian governance system in the later period. The administrative-territorial governance of Batumi District was organized during the third period of the history of the creation of the management board by Russia in Georgia in 1864-1917.

On September 20, 1878, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Mikheil Nikolozidze, signed the administrative contract of Batumi District (the temporary regulation of governance), on the basis of which Batumi district was created. The temporary regulation of the administrative administration of Batumi District gives us a complete idea of the territorial-administrative governance of Batumi District. In particular, as mentioned in the provision, Batumi District was created from the territories of Lazistan Sanjak,¹ of the Ottoman Empire, which Russia conquered in Russia-Turkey in 1877-1878, as a result of the war. According to the regulations, Batumi district was divided into three districts²: 1.

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¹ In the Ottoman Empire, the Sanjak of Lazistan consisted of seven sides (Nahye): Batumi, Churuk-Su, Zed-Adjara, Kvemo Adjara, Machakhli, Artvini and Gonio.

² Френкел А., Очерки Чурук-су и Батума, Тифлиς, 1879,

Batumi district, consisting of Batumi, Kintrish and Gonio districts (Uchstka); 2. Artvini district, consisted of Artanuj, Artvini and Shavsheti districts; 3. Adjara district, consisted of the districts of Zemo Adjara, Kvemo Adjara and Machakhli, headed by a military governor³. And Batumi itself was named, „the city of the port”, and administratively it entered Batumi district. In principle, the Russian Empire left the same administrative-territorial units as in the Sanjak of Lazistan⁴, simply enlarged some Nahiye and introduced the Russian style of government. Batumi district is special as a border region

Military people's governance came under administrative management. In the Russian Empire, it was an organizational system of government that would be in special regions. The district administration was carried out by a military governor and was subordinate to the military department of the Caucasus, and from a military administrative point of view, it obeyed the commander-in-chief of the Caucasus Army⁵.

Under this organizational system of government in the district, the entire civil administration and district was concentrated in the hands of military officials, and the villagers were controlled by Bokauli and elders appointed from influential local residents. Some of the lower positions in the circular administration were sometimes occupied by the local population. The essence of the military-people's system meant that: 1) the indigenous population is governed not by the laws of the empire, but by „folk customs and special rules“; 2) the trial of the locals belongs to the local „people's courts and is conducted under the supervision of the local military authorities according to the local custom and rule; 3) The administrative head of the district was at the same time the commander of the military unit on its territory, who had the right “ to expel harmful residents... Disposal of the regional head purpose and use weapons against residents. Emergencies.⁶

According to the temporary regulation, General-Major Konstantine Besarionidze Komarov⁷ became the first military governor of Batumi district, although he was soon replaced by Major-General B. Smekalov.

A military chancellery and military and civil affairs administration were also established with the military governor. In military and civil affairs, the governor was guided by the instructions received from the Viceroy of the Caucasus. The military governor had an assistant who would perform his duties in the absence of the governor, he was also the chairman of the district court⁸.

As mentioned above, the district was divided into three districts, and the districts themselves into districts. Their superiors and rights and duties were presented and determined by the governor of the district and approved by the crown prince of the

³ Кавказский календарь на 1880, 35-й год, с. 155;

file:///D:/Documents/Downloads/Caucasus_calendar_1879_for_1880.pdf

⁴ Tsintsadze Z. Territorial-administrative division of Chorokhi basin in the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, *Kr. Monuments of South-West Georgia*, vol. 9, vol., 1980, p. 80

⁵ Newspaper *droeba*, #198, 1978

⁶ Утверждение русского владычества на Кавказе. Т. XII, Под ред. генерал-майора В. А. Потто. Тифлис, 1901. С. 437

⁷ Батумь и его окрестности, Батуми, 1906, с. 105

⁸ Newspaper *droeba*, #198, 1978

Caucasus. Those cases that were not related to state crimes were considered by the People's Court or Majlis. It was created in 6 districts and 3 districts. Two market majlis were also created in Batumi and Artvin. For such a state crime as treason, robbery of the treasury, fall of the post office, intentional killing of a man, the criminal was tried by Russian laws. Without Batumi Mazri, the state criminal would not have been tried⁹. According to the regulations of December 11, 1878, the Batumi District Court was subordinated to the Tbilisi Court Chamber. Batumi District existed as an independent territorial-administrative unit until 1883.

On June 12, 1883, Batumi District was abolished and it was merged into Kutaisi Governorate under Batumi and Artvini districts.¹⁰ Batumi and Artvini districts remained part of Kutaisi Governorate until July 1, 1903. During this period, the assistant of the governor of Kutaisi was in Batumi. As it turns out according to the documents preserved in the Historical Central Archive of Georgia, the abolition of Batumi District as a territorial-administrative unit in 1883 was an ill-advised decision. As mentioned in the archival document¹¹, the abolition of the Batumi district in 1883 and its union with the Kutaisi province was an artificial and mechanical step, which was due to the economy of the administrative management costs of the district. Such a decision, on the contrary, hindered the development of Batumi District from Vian. Batumi District and Kutaisi Governorate were fundamentally different systems and places. As it is clear from the archival document, the existence of an independent territorial-administrative unit of Batumi District created a lever of administrative influence on the district from the point of view of the political development of the district.¹² As it is clear from the 14 analyzes of the document preserved in the Central State Archive of Adjara¹³, the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg was not satisfied with the cancellation of the Batumi district either. It is clear from the letter sent from the Imperial Chancellery of St. Petersburg to the name of the Governor of the Caucasus that the Imperial Court asked the Chief Ruler to immediately submit the relevant project on the allocation of Batumi District.

On March 17, 1903, Russian Emperor Nicholas II signed a resolution on the restoration of Batumi District under the leadership of the military governor¹⁴. Major General Mikhail Dryagin, who was the governor until May 1, 1905, was appointed as the military governor. He was then replaced by Major General Peter-Emmanuel Parkay (July 2, 1905-January 1, 1908), and the latter by Boris Romanovsky-Romanko (March 24, 1909-1917).¹⁵

⁹ Newspaper droeba, #198, 1978

¹⁰ Батуми и его окрестности, Батуми, 1906 г. ст. 108

¹² Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Inscription 1, Case 2947, Name of the document Обзор БаТумсКой области за 1904 г. F. 2

¹¹ Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Inscription 1, Case 2947, Name of the document Обзор БаумсКой области а 1904 г. F. 2

¹² Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Inscription 1, Case 2947, Name of the document Обзор БаумсКой области а 1904 г. F. 2

¹³ Central State Archive of Adjara, Fund 7, no. 1, case 431, f. 46

¹⁴ Central State Archive of Kutaisi, fund 130, no. 1, case 258.

¹⁵ Губернии Российской империи. История и руководители. 1708-1917, <https://runivers.ru/bookreader/book10419/#page/2/mode/1up>

What caused the formation of Batumi District as a territorial administrative unit as an independent unit (1878-1883), which existed for only four years, then its abolition and inclusion in Kutaisi Governorate (1883-1903) And then separate again as an independent entity? In this regard, the article published in Tbilisi, published in May 13, 1882 #125 of the newspaper "Кавказ", which conducts the ideological course of the Russian imperial policy, is interesting, where there was an offer to the government to abolish the Batumi district and make it part of the Kutaisi province. It is interesting that in the article, the explanation of this change was proposed - reduction of costs of the treasury of administrative management. The article mentioned that the central government of the district can be abolished without any harm to the case.¹⁶ However, the issue of canceling Batumi district should be considered more in the context of the political reaction carried out by the Russian imperial authorities in the 80s of the 19th century. The latter was directed against the revolutionary forces of the whole of Russia, which was also added to the unacceptable (separatist" battles among the non-Russian peoples, which was strengthened by the policy of forced Garuses, settlement of colonists, confiscation of the native language. For example, reactionary Russification elements tried to completely eliminate the insignificant autonomous rights of Finland and Poland, and in the Caucasus they could not even give a trace of administrative autonomy... and made a new administrative division of the country.¹⁷ Accordingly, the management-board system of Transcaucasia underwent changes. On November 22, 1881, Emperor Alexander III's order was published, by virtue of which the party lost its administrative self-government. The institution of the crown prince of the autonomous government was abolished. The Caucasian administration was headed by the governor, who was far behind the crown prince in his powers.¹⁸ Accordingly, in January 1882, the governance system of Georgia and Transcaucasia was changed. The position of Crown Prince of the Caucasus was abolished and the position of Chief Ruler was established, which meant that the Caucasus was losing even the truncated administrative autonomy it had been granted since the time of Vorontsov and the positions of Governor-General were restored.

By the way, in the same period, the commander-in-chief of the civil part of the Caucasus raised the issue of the inadequacy of the military people's administration in the Caucasus and asked to change this rule of administration. However, the State Council did not agree with the timeliness of such a reform. Accordingly, in Kars, Batumi and other administrative units of the Caucasus, everything remained intact in the form of a military people's administration. The abolition of Batumi district was the result of changes in administrative governance in Transcaucasia under the conditions of political reaction. We think that it should not be considered only in the context of reducing administrative management costs (as expressed in Georgian historiography).

This is also evidenced by the fact that after the reform, the staff of the police in Batumi increased even more. Additional military units were also brought into the city, which were needed to carry out a political reaction on the ground. However, as it is clear

¹⁶ Newspaper, „Kavkaz“, 1882, May 13, #125

¹⁷ Essays on the History of Georgia, Vol. V, edited by Irakli Antelava, Tbilisi 1970, p. 495-496

¹⁸ Vanishvili Sh. Transcaucasia in the Russian system of government, 1864-1917. Tbilisi, 1989. p. 54

from the archival documents, the official authorities were finally convinced that the abolition of Batumi district was a wrong step from the point of view of administrative governance.

In 1883, Batumi District was merged with Kutaisi Governorate Artificial and mechanical union of two fundamentally different systems in one government...Which brought to the treasury a loss that exceeded the economy that would be obtained by abolishing the governance of the independent Batumi district, which weakened the leverage to manage the administrative impact on the district, sacrificing it for immobility in terms of political development.¹⁹ The king's government and its officials thought that with such transformations, they would improve the management-board of the “ side, facilitate the colonization of this bull and the implementation of Russification tasks, although it is clear that there was a difference of opinion among the king's officials on the issues of district management-board. The political reaction of tsarism backfired more throughout the empire, Batumi District was no exception. General Golitsyn, the ruler of the Caucasus, expressed his displeasure in a letter sent to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire in 1883-1885. About the organizers of the reform, whose main goal was to reduce the cost of administrative management of the party. In 1898, Golitsyn raised the issue of reorganization of the gubernatorial administration and also the administrative institutions subordinate to it. The study of the case and the preparation of the draft law was assigned to the director of the head manager's chancellery, who on September 27, 1899, presented an extensive report card, which contained a regulation on Transcaucasian gubernatorial governance. The mentioned project actually left the structure and functions of Transcaucasian institutions unchanged. Moreover, it did not concern other administrative units in the area: Dagestan and Kars districts, Zakatali, Batumi, Artvini and Sukhumi districts, which were part of the military-people's administration agency. Compilation of a separate regulation on their management-board forms was taken into account.²⁰ Despite the above, the issue of establishing Batumi District as a separate administrative unit was not removed from the agenda, which is confirmed by the letter of the military governor of Kutaisi, which he sent to the head of the Caucasus on October 23, 1900, where it was mentioned that we recognized the allocation of Batumi and Artvini districts from Kutaisi Governorate in favor of and necessarily.²¹ We think that this circumstance was also facilitated by the fact that the political reaction in the Russian Empire gave a new charge to the strengthening of the revolutionary situation in the country. And from the end of the 19th century, Batumi District, as a constituent part of the empire, became an important industrial center of the workers' movement. Accordingly, the absence of an administrative center in Batumi was named as one of the reasons for the ineffective struggle before it. They were well aware of the mentioned situation at the imperial court, as evidenced by the letter sent from St. Petersburg to Tbilisi on April 24, 1901 in the name of the ruler of the Caucasus, where it was mentioned that ...very shocking news is coming to us from Batumi. There is no limit

¹⁹ Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Anats. 1, Sat. 2947, f. 1-59

²⁰ Vanishvili Sh. Transcaucasia in the Russian system of government, 1864-1917. Tbilisi, 1989. f. 86-87

²¹ Kutaisi Central State Archive, Fund 186, or. 1, case 759, f. 1

to violence and anti-state activities.It is completely unacceptable for us to leave this corner unattended.Therefore, please start thinking that Batumi District will be removed from Kutaisi Governorate. Moreover, the letter also emphasized that the riots that happened in Batumi on March 9, 1902 could not be avoided precisely because the issue of establishing Batumi District as a separate governorate was still not resolved.²²

These factors played an important role in the decision of the Imperial Court of St. Petersburg, and as we mentioned above, on March 17, 1903, Emperor Nicholas II signed a resolution on the restoration of Batumi District. Its administrative-territorial boundaries were defined as follows. From the north - Kutaisi Governorate, from the east Tbilisi Governorate and Kars District, from the south Lazistan Sanjak (Turkey), from the west the Black Sea. In terms of administrative governance, Oli consisted of two districts: Batumi and Artvini. Each was divided into districts, four districts were given in Batumi district, and three districts in Artvini district. The districts of Batumi district were: Kintrish, Gonio, Lower Adjara, Zemo Adjara; Artvini district consisted of Artvini, Artanuj and Shavshet-Imerkhevi districts; There was also one priest (Bokauli) in Artvin. Each district was divided into a rural district, a total of rural districts were given in Batumi district.²³ In general, it should be noted that in the Russian legislation, a large place was occupied by the establishment of local institutions and the determination of rights and competences. Special importance was attached to border and mountainous regions, whose rule of government was determined by special provisions.²⁴

Among them was Batumi district, which was originally created and managed by the regulations adopted in 1878.²⁵ Batumi District was part of the Caucasus Department of Military-People's Administration and was mainly subject to military rules. Administrative institutions in Batumi district were created on the basis of common state laws, but special rules were also in force, which defined the forms of interdependence of gubernatorial, circular, market, district rural institutions. In addition to the duties defined by the general state laws, the local administration was additionally assigned the management of rural governance, treasury property, food affairs, leadership of national and road parts. The rights and duties of the authorities of Mazri and Okrug were mainly determined by the general state laws. In the legislation of the governance of the Caucasus, separate rules were also fixed on the nature of the relationship between the chief ruler and the market administration. The management of the market administration and the police was entrusted to the heads of Mazri. The heads of the district had the same function. Their competence additionally included the production of national affairs, control of village self-government bodies. Before its abolition in 1918, Batumi District was divided into territorial administrative units: Batumi District, Batumi and Artvini and Okrugs, Artvini consisted of Artanuj, Artvini, Shavshet-Imerkhevi districts. Artvini and Dzansuli districts

²² Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Anats. 1, Sat. 156, F. 24

²³ Vanishvili Sh. Transcaucasia in the Russian system of government, 1864-1917. Tbilisi, 1989. F. 16

²⁴ Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Anats. 1, Sat. 2947, F. 1-59; Historical Central Archive of Georgia, Fund 12, Anats. 1, Sat. 2947; Kutaisi Central State Archive, Fund 18, or. 1, Case 2145

²⁵ Учреждение управления Кавказского края: Т. 2, ч. 2. Свода законов Российской империи. Изд. 1886 г. Санкт-Петербург: Гос. тип. [1886] С. 17-24. <https://www.prlib.ru/item/460379>

were also located in Artvini district Sabokaulo.* Batumi district consisted of Zemo Adjara district with the center Khulo, Gonio district with the center Zemo Maradidi settlement, Kintrish district with the center Komarov settlement, Kvemo-Adjara district with the center village Keda.²⁶

As a result of the dramatic developments in Russia in 1917, the government finally ended up in the hands of the Bolsheviks. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was created, which decided to conclude a separatist truce with Germany. On December 28, 1917, the delegation of the Russian Soviet Republic started peace negotiations with Germany and its allies in Brest-Litovsk. This negotiation ended with the signing of the Armistice Treaty on March 3, 1918, which went down in history under the name of the Treaty of Brest. With this truce, Soviet Russia was forced to cede a large part of the territory of the former Russian Empire, including the territories of historical southwestern Georgia, to the Ottoman Empire. On July 24, 1918, the latter held a referendum in Batumi District in violation of international norms, on the basis of which, on August 15, 1918, Sultan Murad VI's decree on the annexation of Batumi, Kars and Artaan districts to the Ottoman state was issued. As a result, Batumi District, as an administrative-territorial unit, was abolished by the existing administration. From the end of 1918 to March 1921, the fate of Batumi district was determined by the geopolitical and geostrategic situation created in the Caucasus, which found a peculiar reflection on the territorial-administrative arrangement and governance of Batumi district in the following period.²⁷

* Pristastvo/Sabokaulo is an administrative-territorial unit of the Russian Empire. Bokauli was a low-ran

²⁶ Кавказский календарь на 1917 год с. 25-30
file:///D:/Documents/Downloads/Caucasus_calendar_1916_for_1917.pdf

²⁷ Manvelidze I. The Status of the Region of Adjara in Caucasus in the Context of Geopolitical Transformation in 1917-1921 Years, Publication date 2018, Journal Web of Scholar, Volume 5, Issue 1, Pages, 37-40

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