

Georgia and the Caucasus in the Context of Global Political and Diplomatic Transformations (1640–1914): An Interdisciplinary Historical Study

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Abstract

The work is dedicated to a complex study of the political and diplomatic development of Georgia and the Caucasus region from the middle of the 17th century to the beginning of the First World War. The research is based on an interdisciplinary methodology that combines historical, comparative, diplomatic and culturological analysis. The article analyzes the interaction of European, Asian-African and Caucasian spaces, the impact of global political processes on Georgian foreign policy and diplomacy, as well as the transformations of imperial policy.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in understanding the history of Georgia and the Caucasus in the context of global history, which provides the opportunity for a new interpretation of regional events and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of international relations. The work is the first to discuss European, Asian and African political processes in a unified analytical framework in relation to the history of Georgia and the Caucasus.

Keywords: Georgia, Caucasus, global history, history of diplomacy, political transformations, international relations, 17th–20th centuries.

Introduction

The beginning of the 17th–20th centuries is one of the most dynamic and contradictory periods in world history. During this era, the global political order underwent significant changes, which were caused by the expansion of empires, the strengthening of colonialism, the establishment of new economic systems and the formation of new models of international relations. These processes directly affected the Caucasus region, which historically represented the connecting space between Europe and Asia.

Georgia occupied a special place in this geopolitical reality. Its strategic location, proximity to the Black Sea basin and control over transit routes determined the constant interest in the region from both European and Asian and Middle Eastern states. Accordingly, understanding the history of Georgia only in a local context cannot provide a complete explanation of events.

The aim of the work is to analyze the political and diplomatic transformations of Georgia and the Caucasus in the context of global historical processes in 1640–1914 and to demonstrate their role in the development of international relations. The research objectives are:

1. Analysis of global political transformations;
2. Study of Georgian diplomatic practice;
3. Historical interpretation of relations between the peoples of the Caucasus;
4. Identification of the influence of European, Asian and African processes.

Research methodology and source knowledge base

The research is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical-critical analysis, comparative method, study of diplomatic documentation and culturological interpretation. Both Georgian and foreign archives, chronicles, diplomatic correspondence, memoirs and modern historiographical works have been used.

An important place is occupied by European, Russian, Ottoman and Persian sources, which allow to reconstruct a multifaceted picture of Georgia's foreign political ties. Special attention was paid to international treaties, reports of embassy missions and royal court documentation, which ensures the reliability of the research.

Georgia and the Global Political Space in the 17th–18th Centuries (1640–1789)

From the middle of the 17th century, Georgia found itself at the epicenter of the constant political and military confrontation between the Ottoman Empire and Iran. This situation determined the main directions of the foreign policy of the Georgian kingdoms and principalities. One of the main tasks was to establish political and diplomatic ties with the states of Western Europe, which served both to obtain military support and to strengthen international recognition.

Deepening contacts with Europe was associated with the idea of Christian solidarity, through which the Georgian political elite tried to weaken the pressure of the Muslim empires. During this period, diplomatic relations with the Papal Curia, the royal courts of France, Spain and Austria became more active. Embassy missions and diplomatic correspondence clearly reflect Georgia's desire to integrate into the European political space.

In the second half of the 18th century, the direction towards Russia acquired particular importance. Geopolitical circumstances and the constant threat of Ottoman-Iranian aggression led to a strategic rapprochement with the Russian Empire, which culminated in the Treaty of Georgievsk (1783). This agreement created a new political reality that had a significant impact on the development of Georgia as a state.

The Caucasus in Global Imperial Politics

The Caucasus has historically been a strategic region where European, Asian, and Middle Eastern political, economic, and military interests intersected. Its geographical location — in the space connecting the Black and Caspian Seas — determined the region's special importance both in terms of control of transit routes and in terms of military-strategic considerations. It is these factors that made the Caucasus one of the most important arenas of global imperial politics in the 17th–19th centuries.

The gradual expansion of the Russian Empire to the south, the political and military weakening of the Ottoman Empire, and the internal political crisis in Iran led to a gradual change in the balance of power in the region. As a result of these processes, the Caucasus was increasingly integrated into the international political system and became a space for global power confrontation. The concentration of imperial interests in the region gave rise to a multi-layered political reality, where diplomatic negotiations, military confrontations, and economic expansion were intertwined.

The administrative and military policy of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus essentially transformed traditional political structures. The autonomous management models of local kingdoms and principalities were gradually replaced by a centralized administrative system, which served to strengthen imperial control. This process contributed to the formation of new social and bureaucratic elites, but at the same time it led to the breakdown of traditional social hierarchies and deepened ethnic and religious conflicts.

Military reforms, tax reforms, and new land tenure models implemented within the framework of imperial policy significantly affected the social structure of the region. These processes were especially acute in the mountainous Caucasus, where traditional social relations strongly resisted new forms of imperial rule. As a result, the Caucasus became a space not only of geopolitical interests, but also of cultural and civilizational confrontation.

Georgia in this multidimensional context became a mediator between the Western and Eastern worlds. Its political elite tried to maintain the possibility of diplomatic maneuvering and protect national interests in the conditions of the global balance of power. Georgia's diplomatic activity was aimed both at deepening relations with European states and maintaining a dialogue with the Middle Eastern political center, which created a multi-vector foreign policy model.

Thus, the Caucasus, and especially Georgia, did not represent a peripheral zone of global politics. On the contrary, the region actively participated in imperial strategies and represented an important element of the system of international relations, which clearly demonstrates its role in the formation of global historical processes.

The role of Asian and African countries in global political transformations

In the 18th–19th centuries, the political, economic and social processes taking place in Asia and Africa were one of the most important components of global transformations. The expansion of European colonialism, the establishment of new trade routes, and the transformation of the international economic system fundamentally changed the global balance of power. These changes had a significant impact not only on the directly colonized territories, but also on those regions that were indirectly involved in these processes, including the Caucasus.

The expansion of European states in Asia and Africa significantly weakened traditional empires and kingdoms, which was manifested both in the restriction of political independence and in the loss of economic sovereignty. Particularly noticeable are the colonization of India by Britain, the integration of North Africa into the colonial systems of France and Italy, and the political transformation of the Middle East against the background of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. These processes created a new geopolitical reality that laid the foundation for the modern system of international relations.

The weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the gradual decline of its influence in the Caucasus became a particularly important factor. The weakening of the Ottoman position paved the way for the expansion of the Russian Empire to the south, which ultimately resulted in the formation of a new balance of power in the region. At the same time, Iran's internal political crisis and administrative weakness further strengthened Russia's strategic position in the South Caucasus.

The economic transformations taking place in the spaces of Asia and Africa significantly changed the world trade system. The development of new transit routes and the dominance of maritime trade gradually weakened the role of traditional land trade routes, although the Caucasus still retained an important transit function in the space connecting the Black and Caspian Seas. This circumstance determined the preservation of the strategic importance of the region in the global economic network.

Cultural contacts in Asia and Africa contributed to the activation of intellectual and ideological movements, which indirectly reflected on the public life of the Caucasus. The spread of education, religious reforms and political ideas created a new public discourse, which was associated with the processes of modernization and the formation of national self-consciousness. Such intellectual flows spread in the Caucasus through both European and Eastern cultural channels.

Thus, the political and economic transformations of the countries of Asia and Africa were not only events of local or regional importance, but were an integral part of global processes. Their impact on the Caucasus clearly shows that the region was involved in the broader dynamics of world history and actively responded to international political and economic changes.

Georgia and the System of International Relations in the 19th Century (1789–1914)

The new political order formed after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had a significant impact on the Caucasus region. The strengthening of the Russian Empire and the interests of the states of Western Europe determined the international status of Georgia.

By the end of the 19th century, Georgia was integrated into the imperial political space, although it retained its cultural and diplomatic identity. The development of education, the press, and intellectual movements contributed to the strengthening of national self-consciousness.

Diplomatic practice and international relations

Georgian diplomatic activity in the 17th–19th centuries was a multifaceted, dynamic, and adaptive process, encompassing both military-political alliances and cultural, religious, and trade relations. The country's geopolitical location and constant threat from powerful neighboring empires led to a special flexibility and multi-vector nature of its diplomatic strategy. Georgia's ruling circles were forced to develop a model of foreign policy that would simultaneously ensure survival, preserve state identity, and gain international support.

Diplomatic ties with Western Europe occupied an important place in Georgia's foreign policy. Active relations with the Papal Curia, the French, Spanish and Austrian royal courts were based on the idea of Christian solidarity and aimed at weakening the military pressure of the Ottomans and Iran. Embassy missions, which were regularly sent to Europe in the 17th–18th centuries, clearly reflect Georgia's attempts to engage in European political discourse and obtain political, military and financial support. These contacts contributed to Georgia's rapprochement with the European cultural space, which was also reflected in the processes of modernization of education, law and state administration.

An important direction of Georgia's diplomatic practice was relations with the Middle Eastern states. Negotiations with Iran and the Ottomans were often of a coercive nature and served to preserve the country's territorial integrity and political autonomy. Despite the difficult circumstances, Georgian diplomacy managed to create a certain space for maneuver, which was expressed in temporary truces, dynastic marriages and the acquisition of trade privileges.

From the second half of the 18th century, the entry into the political orbit of the Russian Empire significantly changed the nature of Georgian foreign policy. The Treaty of Georgievsky (1783) created a new diplomatic reality, under which Georgia formally retained sovereignty, although in fact it found itself under imperial control. In this situation, the Georgian political elite tried to maintain diplomatic balance, protect its own interests and preserve national identity within the framework of the imperial administrative system.

In the 19th century, as part of the Russian Empire, Georgia's diplomatic activity was mainly transferred to the cultural and intellectual spheres. Georgian public and political figures actively participated in international scientific, cultural and educational processes, which created new forms of Georgia's integration into the global space. These processes contributed to the formation of a national movement and the formation of a new political identity.

Thus, Georgia's diplomatic practice in the 17th–19th centuries was a process of constant adaptation to the changing geopolitical environment. The country's foreign policy was based on a

multi-vector strategy that combined European, Middle Eastern and Russian directions. Such an approach ensured the preservation of Georgia's international subjectivity and created the prerequisites for its active involvement in global political processes.

Historical Relations of the Peoples of the Caucasus

The multiethnic space of the Caucasus has historically represented a unique area of dialogue between cultures, civilizations and religions, where different linguistic, ethnic and confessional groups have coexisted for centuries. This diversity has led to a complex social and political configuration, which was based on multifaceted forms of both cooperation and confrontation. The geographical environment, difficult terrain and strategic location of the Caucasus have contributed to both the preservation of local identities and intensive cultural exchange, which has given the region a special historical dynamic.

Georgia has been an important connecting link in this diverse space. Its political and cultural centers—Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Gori, and other cities—have served for centuries as centers of trade, administration, and education, where various ethnic and religious groups have come together. The Georgian language, culture, and Orthodox Church have played an important integrating role, contributing to a degree of regional stability.

Relations between the peoples of the Caucasus have been characterized by both economic and cultural cooperation and military and political confrontation. Control of trade routes, land ownership, and the distribution of political influence have often been the basis for conflict. In addition, intermarriage, common economic interests, and the interaction of religious institutions between ethnic groups have created stable patterns of cooperation that have reduced the potential for conflict escalation.

In the 19th century, the expansion of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus has fundamentally changed traditional social and political structures. The introduction of the imperial administrative system and the strengthening of military rule weakened the influence of local feudal elites and contributed to the formation of new bureaucratic and educational institutions. These processes had a significant impact on the growth of social mobility in the region and the expansion of access to education, especially in urban centers.

At the same time, imperial policy exacerbated the issue of ethnic and religious identities. Under centralized rule, partial ignorance of local cultural characteristics often led to social tension. Nevertheless, the development of the educational system and the formation of new intellectual elites contributed to the strengthening of national self-consciousness in the region, which became an important political factor by the beginning of the 20th century.

Thus, the historical relations of the peoples of the Caucasus were a dynamic process, constantly undergoing transformation under the influence of global and regional political changes. Georgia's role in this space is particularly important as a cultural medium and political mediator, which determined its special place in the historical development of the Caucasus.

Cultural and Economic Factors in a Global Context

Georgia historically played a central and strategic role in the system of trade routes between Europe and Asia. The branches of the Silk Road, Black Sea ports, Caucasian passes and internal geographical transit points created the prerequisites for economic integration, which allowed Georgia to gain significant trade and money circulation benefits. Trade activities carried out in the region included both local products - wine, fruit, clay, jewelry, and the sale of imported goods, which increased the diversification and sustainability of the local economy.

Economic activity was accompanied by intensive cultural and intellectual interaction. Through trade routes, the cultural, religious and political experience of different countries spread to Georgia. European education systems, scientific achievements, technological innovations, and political ideas entered Georgian society through trade and diplomatic ties. This process represented not only the transfer of knowledge, but also a platform for cultural adaptation and modernization, which had a significant impact on the social development of the country.

Cultural-economic contacts also contributed to the formation of new social elites. The trade and intellectual elite became intermediaries between local authorities and the global cultural-economic network. As a result, Georgia would become not only a transit and economic lever, but also a regional cultural center, where new ideas, educational initiatives, and political-intellectual attitudes converged with local traditions.

Thus, Georgia's economic and cultural activity represented a unified process, which was equally based on global trade networks and the depth of cultural relations. The importance of the Silk Road and Black Sea ports, the function of the Caucasian transit channels, the integration of Western education and technologies created the prerequisites for sustainable socio-economic development, which in turn facilitated the country's effective involvement in global political and economic processes.

Comparative historical analysis

A comparison of Georgia's historical development with the political, social and economic trajectories of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa reveals that regional processes were organically involved in global transformations. Although the geographical distances between the regions were large, political, military and economic events were intertwined: the strengthening of colonialism, imperial expansion, the dominance of trade routes and cultural contacts created a single system in which Georgia and the Caucasus played an important role.

The similarities between the history of Georgia and other regions are particularly evident in the impact of colonialism, the mechanisms of imperial rule, and the formation of national identities. In Eastern Europe, as well as in the Caucasus and the Middle East, local elites constantly adapted to the conditions of imperial control. These included attempts at diplomatic maneuvering, trade and cultural compromises, and the adaptation of new educational and administrative structures. This process, in turn, contributed to the preservation of national self-awareness and the strengthening of political identity in the face of global challenges.

The individual features of the processes developing in the Caucasus region are particularly important: the multiethnicity of the region, the complex terrain, the strategic location and the constant clash of geopolitical interests created a situation in which Georgian diplomacy and

political elites constantly tried to maintain balance. This type of dynamic comparative analysis allows us to better identify common mechanisms that operated within the framework of imperial policy, colonialism and cultural relations.

Scientific novelty

The scientific novelty of the work lies in understanding the history of Georgia and the Caucasus in the context of global history, which has not been fully implemented so far. For the first time, European, Asian and African political, economic and cultural processes are discussed in a unified analytical framework using the example of Georgia.

Scientific novelty is expressed in the following directions:

1. Analysis of the influence of global processes on the historical development of the Caucasus and Georgia;
2. Systematic comparison of European, Asian and African transformations;
3. Interdisciplinary assessment of the process of national identity formation;
4. Integration of diplomatic, cultural and economic factors in the analysis of regional history.

As a result, the work creates a new interpretative model that reflects the historical reality of the Caucasus in relation to global processes and enriches the methodology of regional history research.

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Conclusion

The research clearly shows that Georgia and the Caucasus in the 17th–19th centuries were not on the periphery of global history. On the contrary, the region was actively involved in international political, economic, and cultural processes.

Georgia's diplomatic practice, military-political negotiations, trade, and cultural relations were an example of strategic adaptation and flexibility that allowed the country's political elite to preserve its national identity, manage numerous ethnic and religious groups, and respond to the challenges of global imperial politics.

Thus, the work not only reflects the role of Georgia and the Caucasus in global processes, but also emphasizes the importance of regional history research in an international context and offers a new interpretative model for modern historiography.

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