

Georgia's Minorities in Crisis: From Coexistence to Conflict

Abstract

The dissolution of the Soviet Union on 26 December 1991 led to the creation of 15 independent multiethnic states, where dominant ethnic groups sought to consolidate their power within the confines of the total political system. As a consequence, tensions between ethnic groups worsened in many of the newly independent states, including Georgia, where cultural competition and the legitimacy of an ethnic group's control over disputed territory further escalated from regional inter-ethnic conflict into an international crisis. This study primarily focuses on the Abkhazian region of Georgia and the rise of their severe political crises, which are deeply rooted in centuries-old ethnocentric disputes between ethnic Abkhazians and Georgians. To examine the social composition and organization of the post-Soviet nation-states, the paradigm of politics in ethnically plural societies will occupy the primary focus of this study. In order to account for political machinations in undermining ethnic minorities rights and political integration in the multinational states, the following pages will establish an emphasis on the making of the Russian Empire, communist policy regarding nationality and the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR), which paved the way to the eruption of the inter-ethnic security dilemma in the post-Cold War era. To illustrate the defining characteristic of the Abkhaz–Georgian conflict and how this conflict changed over time, this study will progress within a theoretical model based on ancient hatreds and ethnic outbidding hypothesis and argue that both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union fostered ethno nationalist developments through their empire building processes and consolidating a national cohesion through the predominant unifying parameters such as language, ethnicity, culture or religion, where ethnic outbidding became the catalyst for interethnic tensions.